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ABSTRACT

This document contains materials about and from the "History of Adult Literacy Weekend" that was held at the University of New England in Armidale, Australia. The following papers about the weekend are included: "Foreword" (Patricia Ward, Rosie Wickert); "Introduction" (Rosie Wickert); "Focus on Oral History" (Janis Wilton); and "Arch Nelson Reminisces about Adult Literacy" (Arch Nelson). Also included are a list titled "Emerging Research Questions" that was compiled after Janis Wilton's workshop, and abstracts compiled by Rosie Wickert of six background reports. The texts of the background reports contained in this document are: "Helpful Histories" (Deborah Tyler, Lesley Johnson); "How Adult Literacy Became a Public Issue in Australia" (John Hodgens); "Introduction of 'Debating Literacy in Australia: A Documentary History 1945-1994'" (Bill Green, John Hodgens, Allan Luke); "'Fall out the Illiterates'--Lessons from a World War II Adult Literacy Program" (Darryl R. Dymock); "'An Issue of Significant Community Concern': The Postwar Development of Adult Literacy Policy and Provision in Australia" (Darryl R. Dymock); and "A Selected Chronology of Events" (James A. Draper). Several background reports contain substantial bibliographies. Appended is a list of key dates in the history of adult literacy. Contains 11 references. (MN)

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Towards a history of adult literacy in Australia

A Record of the History of Adult Literacy Weekend
November 1994

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Towards a history of adult literacy in Australia

A Record of the History of Adult Literacy Weekend
November 1994

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Acronyms

ABE	Adult Basic Education
ACAL	Australian Council of Adult Literacy
ALBE	Adult Literacy and Basic Education
ALF	Australian Literacy Federation
ALLP	Australia's Language and Literacy Policy
NLLIA	National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UNE	University of New England
UTS	University of Technology, Sydney

Foreword

A Workshop: Towards a History of Adult Literacy in Australia was organised by the NSW node of the NLLIA Adult Literacy Research Network and held at the University of New England, Armidale, on the weekend of November 12/13 1994.

The University of New England, Armidale was chosen because of its significant place in the history of adult literacy in Australia. Arch Nelson was the founding President of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy which was officially formed in October 1976. He held this position until 1984, after which he became Patron for a further five years. Through his association with the University of New England, Arch was able to provide much needed infrastructure support to the fledgling ACAL and must take much of the credit for the important position that ACAL came to play in policy making arenas. Additionally, a number of influential ACAL publications were published with the assistance of the University of New England, one of which was 'Adult Literacy Provision in Australia: Trends and Needs (1982), written by Darryl Dymock, an academic at the University of New England, who also has a long and committed association with ACAL. Further, Armidale witnessed the NSW Department of TAFE's first step towards adult literacy provision in 1975, when the Technical College and the College of Advanced Education at Armidale cooperated in an adult literacy program using volunteer student teachers.

In this foreword we wish, in particular, to thank Arch Nelson, now into his eighties, for his energetic contribution to the weekend and Darryl Dymock for his help in making the weekend so productive and enjoyable. We also wish to thank the guest speakers: Janis Wilton for her wonderfully stimulating introduction to 'doing' oral history, Bill Green for his insights and his historical imagination, and Chris Buckley, the University of New England's archivist, who alerted us, at short notice, to some of the realities of establishing an historical collection.

Finally we would like to thank all the participants for their interest in and contribution to the weekend: Trish Branson (SA), Chris Campbell (NSW), Margaret Caruthers (SA), Audrey Grant (La Trobe), Heather Haughton (VIC) and Jean Searle (QLD).

Patricia Ward
Rosie Wickert
UTS

Introduction

ROSIE WICKERT

Why History?

> "We need to plan for the future. But to do so effectively we must study our past and know our present situation. Very little has been written about the history of education for adult literacy in Australia" Arch Nelson - some notes for ACAL's eighth conference in 1984

> "... historical research, however well done and however brilliantly expounded, will not provide the large formulations that might enable the remaking of the organisational and educational worlds. But it could supply a little insight - and even a little insight might prevent the issuing of politically naive and intellectually confused reports. Those who work in, or wish to change, large social organisations like Education Departments, sail amidst shifting winds on treacherous waters. A knowledge of history provides them with charts and helps acquaint them with the local climactic conditions. Such information will not tell them where to go; but once they have decided their destination, it will help them get there. And it might stop them, while they are making up their minds, from being pulled by the wind onto rocks of whose existence they are ignorant."
> R.J.W Selleck. The Restructuring: Some historical reflections. In Murray Frazer, Jeffrey Dunstan and Philip Creed. Eds. (1985) *Perspectives on Organisational Change: Lessons from education.* Melbourne: Longman. p.123

> "history serves to show that-which-is has not always been...since these things have been made, they can be unmade." Michel Foucault (1988) Critical theory/intellectual history', in L.D. Kritzman Ed. (1988) *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977 - 1984* . New York.

Background to the History Weekend Project

To say that literacy is a complex term appears to be stating the self-evident. But to whom is it self-evident? Certainly those of us who have been involved in literacy education and literacy politics have lived that complexity. Furthermore, the potential for ever greater complexity sometimes seems limitless as we get to ask more and different kinds of questions about literacy. For many of us, that is part of what makes working in the area of literacy education so compelling. But for many others, the term literacy evokes images of school reading and writing and the temptation to stifle a yawn of utter boredom. It is not until some event causes a degree of engagement with the concept, that any inquiry or interest is triggered.

In the adult literacy world, we have not been as prepared as we could be to respond constructively and productively to the many questions that are emerging as more and more people, and not just academic researchers, find their interest in the subject quickened. Adult literacy has a fascinating and complicated history in Australia - philosophically, pedagogically and politically. But so much of that history lies in the memories, filing cabinets and under the beds of a relatively small number of people who are

(L-R) Back- Audrey Grant, Arch Nelson, Jean Searle, Trish Branson and Heather Haughton. Front- Patricia Ward, Chris Campbell, Rosie Wickert and Darryl Dymock

themselves important parts of that history. And maybe because adult literacy has a grass roots history, driven by the commitment and energy of practitioners, rather than the intellectual interests of academics and researchers, the need to make that history visible and accessible has not been well understood.

The less information there is about something the harder it is to know how to act or what to think about it, and it is certainly very hard to make commitments on the basis of scant knowledge. On what basis can decisions about the future of adult literacy be made when so little is known about it? The policy makers' dilemma. This dilemma is clearly evident in the sub-text of the two national language policies that have succeeded in getting a degree of government expenditure for adult literacy. The adult literacy components of the National Policy on Languages (NPL) (Lo Bianco 1987) and the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP) (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1991) both drew attention to the need for, and actually secured funds for policy related research in order to develop a knowledge base on which to base future decisions.

Our concern here is not about what kinds of projects were funded or whose interests they served or about all those issues to do with commissioned research projects, but about the fact that fairly substantial amounts of new research funds attracted a new interest in the field. But when researchers tried to get some kind of a handle on what they were studying, there was nothing to grab.

To those coming from outside, adult literacy in Australia was seemingly without a history. But constructing a history is not a straightforward descriptive exercise. It is also a political one. So although research teams around Australia were attempting to construct some kind of historical understanding in order to provide some context for their work, these historical understandings usually emerged in the form of literature reviews designed to serve the purpose of contextualising specific projects. This is perfectly valid - but partial.

One of the important achievements of the NLLIA Adult Literacy Research Network is that its funding is not linked to specific commissioned projects. It was established explicitly, as a strategy of the ALLP, to strengthen the research base in adult literacy (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1991, p.21). The concept of the network, argued for strongly by ex-practitioners and argued against by some established academics, was supported in the ALLP as a way of building research strength on a national basis rather than focusing only on one or two centres. This may not produce the kind of research quality that some academics expect, at least not for a while, but it is consistent with the bottom up philosophy of adult education which is based on an egalitarian philosophy of partnership, learning through experience and responsiveness to local needs.

It is this freedom that enabled the NSW Node of the Adult Literacy Research Network to decide to begin to acquire the knowledge and skills of historically oriented research. We did not want to become historians, rather we wanted to develop our understandings of how to work with historical material so as to better understand, explore and unpack the field of adult literacy education. However, in addition to acquiring those research skills, it soon became obvious that an important first step was to catch the stories of adult literacy in Australia before they began to disappear. Key individuals

are getting older and material is disappearing amid the seemingly endless restructurings and repositionings of provision. The workshop held at Armidale in November 1994 was the first step in this direction.

Objectives of the history weekend

Given the scope of the task, the objectives were quite varied. The intention at this stage was to cover ground rather than to dig deep in any one particular place. Invitations were sent out to a range of people in all states and territories; the rationale for this being that a research agenda around adult literacy's history should be something that was collaboratively developed. The NSW ALRN saw itself as the host of this initiative; it did not necessarily want to own the entire 'history of adult literacy' project.

1) The first objective was to begin a process whereby material could be collected before it started to disappear. This had two dimensions. One concerned learning about how to collect and archive material in a systematic and accessible way. The other concerned learning techniques of researching particular histories using methodologies such as those developed by oral historians. Thus this objective had a document focus and an interpersonal focus.

2) The second objective was to begin to develop our knowledge about ways of making sense of history. What kinds of theoretical and analytical perspectives can be called on and in what kinds of ways, to make what kinds of sense of history? We know there is more than one history. What kinds of ways of thinking about history are there? What kinds of questions can be asked of particular histories? What kinds of analyses can be made of historical material?

3) A third objective concerned our wish to develop a network of people concerned with adult literacy's histories and who might want to begin to work together on particular projects.

4) Linked to the above was our fourth objective, which was to develop, in a collaborative fashion, some kind of research agenda; to explore and document the kinds of ideas and interests that such a network of people might hold and to begin to identify ways of starting on this work.

Activities of the history weekend

Guest speakers were invited on the basis of how they might be able to contribute to each of the objectives above.

To accomplish the first objective, Janis Wilton, Senior Lecturer in History at UNE was asked to run a workshop on ways of thinking about doing history research with a special emphasis on techniques of oral history. This was a wonderful exercise which stimulated many of the participants to want to start straight away! However, as Janis reminded us, a prior, and often neglected question, concerns the management, cataloguing and storage of historical material. Accordingly, Chris Buckley, the archivist at the University of New England was invited to tell us how to begin to collect and archive the wealth of historical material scattered around Australia.

The second objective was met by inviting Bill Green from Deakin University to speak at the workshop. Bill Green is an academic with a keen interest in the history and politics of curriculum. During the course of collecting material for a post-war history on literacy in Australia, he had become very aware of adult literacy's place in this history. An extract from that, as yet unpublished, report was circulated in advance of the meeting and is included with this report. Part of Bill's project in interpreting history, particularly through its documentation, is to unsettle common sense assumptions about history through the use of Foucauldian perspectives of historical analysis. His presentation enabled us to think about a number of different kinds of ways of asking questions about historical data, and also about the concept of adult literacy. We hope to publish his talk at a later stage.

The original call for expressions of interest still holds

History of Adult Literacy in Australia

A group of people are interested in gathering the rich and varied history of adult literacy and numeracy before it's 'lost' or 'forgotten'. To this end, we'd like to hear from people who have any documentation (letters, policies, reviews, etc) from the 'old' days of adult literacy or who have interviewed practitioners and others who have worked in the field for some time, especially in 'the early days'. If you have any materials which you think should be kept as part of the history of the field or you would like more information, please get in touch.

NSW Adult Literacy Research Network

phone: (02) 330 3817 or

fax: (02) 330 3939.

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Some of the participants at the workshop already have a developed sense of the history of adult literacy in Australia. Arch Nelson spoke about many of his memories which caused a number of us to reflect on some of Janis Wilton's suggestions on talking to people about their life histories. Darryl Dymock spoke of his experience as a researcher of the history of adult literacy policy and provision in Australia.

All this activity then contributed to the brainstorming work that marked the pursuance of the fourth objective. Although an extensive list of ideas emerged from this process, the contributions of the speakers had effectively introduced a note of realism into the aspirations of the participants such that our attentions became focused on what was reasonable and 'doable' as a next stage. Much of the workshopping activity of the group focussed on this issue and is reported below. One gesture in this direction was that the proceedings of the workshop were taped and transcribed.

Outcomes of the Workshop

- transcription of Arch Nelson's talk and a subsequent video interview of his recollections "A Fair Go for All".

- emerging questions deriving from the participants' collective thoughts. (These are included in this report.)

- this publication of the workshop proceedings including the papers circulated prior to the workshop with abstracts and edited versions of the transcripts of guest presentations.

- a submission prepared, in association with ACAL and the NLLIA, for funds to begin to establish an archival collection of documents. Although this was unsuccessful in obtaining funds from the Community Heritage Grants Program of the National Library, the process of writing the submission has helped clarify what needs to be done. The NLLIA and the UTS NSW Adult Literacy Research Network node are now acting on the basis of that submission. Expert advice is currently being sought about how to categorise a collection such as the Adult Literacy Archive so that material can be classified on receipt and stored in a systematic manner.

- request to the National Library Manuscript Librarian to house an archive.

- workshop presentations at the 1995 ACAL conference with a view to strengthening and developing a network and facilitating the archival collection.

- an initial register of people whose oral histories should be recorded (ethical guidelines need to be prepared along with consent forms).

- procedures for the clearance of materials to be deposited in the archive.

- approaches have been made to a number of possible sources of financial assistance.

Longer term outcomes

These will be discussed at the 1995 ACAL Conference Workshop

- an initial register of documentary and other materials. (This has not yet been started by this project because we learnt that it demands expertise to avoid time wasting and double handling).

- design of a policy framework for establishing an archive.

- decisions about manageable research projects to be conducted in the future

- an increase in discussion and 'information flow' about adult literacy's history through journal articles and conference presentations.

- a team for writing an edited book on adult literacy's history.

- establishment of mailing list/network.

References

Department of Employment, Education and Training (1991) *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy* Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Dymock, Darryl (1982) *Adult Literacy Provision in Australia: Trends and Needs* Armidale: University of New England.

Lo Bianco, Joseph (1987) *National Policy on Languages* Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Focus on Oral History

JANIS WILTON

Janis Wilton conducted a practice oriented workshop with the objective of exploring the techniques of oral history. She focused on the more practical aspects of the discipline which would provide a foundation on which practitioners and researchers could build their own work.

The three key areas of oral history which Janis explored are:

1. The role and use of memory in oral history
2. Good practice in interviewing
3. The stages in setting up an oral history project

The role and use of memory in oral history

The Three Key Areas of Oral History

1. The role and use of memory in oral history

2. Good practice in interviewing

3. The stages in setting up an oral history project

She began the workshop by describing memory. Understanding the role of memory in undertaking oral history research is essential in successfully utilising the sources. A competent oral historian will be able to uncover details that had previously been forgotten. There are several techniques that can be put into practice in this regard, but first the nature of memory has to be understood, as far as that is possible.

People cannot possibly remember everything that they are exposed to intellectually or experientially. There are two major criteria by which we select what we are to retain. Firstly, we remember what we understand. This is very evident in a typical classroom situation. It is next to impossible to absorb a mathematical function that is totally alien to us. By contrast, when we are familiar with its workings, we can readily recall the method. This is because we have processed it.

Secondly we remember what we are interested in. This goes hand in hand with remembering what we understand as we are often interested in what we understand, or vice versa.

Memory is also selective in terms of censorship, that is to say that there is conscious as well as unconscious censorship. People may deliberately choose not to share a memory, or deliberately block a memory out, or repress it.

Another thing to consider in relation to memory is the effect that social change and differing moral contexts have on the retrieval of a memory and the form in which that memory will be manifested. Janis used the example of a woman who has had an abortion. Forty years ago it would have been rare for someone to admit to having had an abortion, and if she did the terms of reference may well have been guilt ridden and self flagellating. Today, because of a shift in moral consciousness in relation to the issue of abortion, a description of the event would be very different. The memory essentially is the same, but it has been profoundly influenced by the current societal attitudes.

Janis then went on to describe how best to trigger memories. The first point of contact is to ask about personal experience to ascertain certain chronological reference points. An example of this is not to ask what year something obscure happened, but to link it with a personal event such as a pregnancy or a relocation. People are much more adept at remembering events, images, feelings, attitudes and places, rather than facts and figures. The oral historian must accept this and turn it to their advantage.

Good practice in interviewing

It is essential to keep field notes, or an interview diary to document the interviewer's

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reaction to events and reflections on proceedings.
Reviewing this after the interview can serve the function of determining whether the interview had achieved its aims. Questions can be answered such as 'Did I go to the interview with my agenda set?'

Ethical practice in interviewing is an extremely important consideration in the field of oral history. There are two levels of ethics that are relevant. Firstly, there are ethical considerations relating to the interviewee. A certain responsibility has to be accepted for a person's emotional state after an interviewer has probed memories that may be painful. Measures that may need to be taken include making sure that someone is there with the interviewee to offer emotional support after the interviewer leaves.

It is essential that the interviewee's requests in relation to the interview must always be adopted. If a person says they want all tapes and transcripts to be destroyed the oral historian must comply.

The second category of ethical considerations is those more concerned with adhering to the law, particularly copyright and the restriction of documents under acts such as the thirty year rule.

Copyright in oral history is very complicated. Essentially the record of the interview belongs to the person who owns the tape. This can get messy if the interviewer is funded by a government department. When the tape is transcribed the situation becomes even more unclear, with ownership being dually held by the interviewer and interviewee, with the funding having some copyright control. For these reasons, it is essential to specify conditions before the interview takes place, and to make sure each party is aware of the situation and their rights and obligations.

The stages in setting up a project

Janis presented the participants with a very practical and pragmatic approach to the development of an oral history project. Focusing a project is the most important feature of the project set up stage. The questions which follow are:
How is a suitable focus chosen?
Where do we go from there?

The process of focusing a project must be based on a careful consideration of priorities and a ruthless pruning of objectives. A broad project is often much less useful, and a great deal more stressful than a manageable focused task. Small projects and focused case studies are often ideal preparations for a broader project somewhere down the line.

A simple way to guarantee a focus is to set a specific question to be addressed. The question can be modified during the course of the project. It is not designed to be a rigid framework, but to serve as a reference point to keep coming back to.

The next stage is to access sources, either interviews or other primary sources such as photographs, newspaper articles and, in the case of adult education, teachers' notes or programs. A repository should also be identified and confirmed. There are a number of these located in major cities, most commonly situated in libraries, universities or private archives.
With these ideas about the establishment of the archive, Janis concluded her session.

Arch Nelson, Trish Branson and Janis Wilton

Oral History Notes
Prepared by Janis Wilton as handouts for the workshop

Stages of and Oral History Project

1. Inspiration and Motivation
What is oral history
Variety of uses

2. Preparation
Be realistic
Topic
The nature of memory
Questions
Questionnaires
Interview skills
Equipment
Ethics
Copyright
Practice interview
Selecting interviews

3. The Interview
Before:
- Specific background preparation
- Interviewee profile
- Location and time
- Checklist

During:
- The interview
- Other sources
- Informal conversations

After:
- Interview evaluation
- Ongoing contact

4. Processing the interviews
Keeping records
Transcribing
Accessing interview contents
Storage and preservation
Consultation with interviewee/s

5. Final Product
Audience
Form and Focus
Evaluating interview contents
Editing
Introductions & commentaries
Photographs & illustrations
Interviewee review & approval
The first draft
The End!

Interview Skills

Do:
- be a good listener
- follow your interviewee's train of thought
- stick to a fruitful area and follow it through while the memories are flowing
- be sensitive to your interviewee's feelings, values and needs
- be aware of your own biases and prejudices
- be patient
- use appropriate language
- ask for descriptions and examples
- use sensitive 'open-ended' and 'follow-up' questions as often as possible
- be alert to touchy subjects and don't just blunder in
- follow-up emotions e.g. how did you feel about to? How did you react?
- be empathetic i.e. suppress your own emotions and values, and empathise with those of your interviewee
- provide emotional support when needed
- probe generalisations
- allow your interviewee to complete a story
- encourage interviewees to reconstruct conversations e.g. and what did the mayor say then?
- encourage interviewees to reconstruct conversations e.g. could you take me on an imagery walk through the house?
- respect silences if they are pauses while your interviewee collects and/or selects memories
- be able to pick up leads, make a mental note, and return to a point later
- provide positive reinforcement to assure your interviewees that the memories they are offering are worthwhile e.g. . That's a very interesting point. Could you tell me more about that?
- ask for and make use of family photo graphs and other personal documents and papers
- spend time with you interviewee

The interviewer should ask that funding bodies or employers

provide a written contract or agree to a written proposal that clearly states the purpose and intended use of interviews and what copyright provisions apply

accept the confidential status of interviews until the completion of a signed agreement allows otherwise

allow the interviewer to act professionally and to abide by the guidelines of ethical practice of the Oral History Association of Australia

place interviews in a repository where they will be available for research, subject to any conditions placed by the parties involved.

ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

GUIDELINES OF ETHICAL PRACTICE

Janis Wilton

Preamble

1. The Oral History Association was formed in 1978 to promote the practice of oral history in Australia. There are branches of the Association in each State which provide information and forums for discussion about oral history.

2. The Association is concerned that due regard is given to ethical practices and strongly advises that the following guidelines be followed by anyone involved in oral history.

3. Oral history involves recording, preserving and making available candid information that may be sensitive or confidential. The Association advises all interviewers to act to preserve the rights and responsibilities of the different parties involved and to refuse to work in any other way.

4. These guidelines describe ethical practice only. Information about method is available elsewhere and it is hoped that no-one undertakes oral history without being competent in interview technique.

5. Questions regarding any issue arising from these guidelines may be directed to the Oral History Association of Australia.

The interviewer's responsibilities are to protect the rights of interviewees by:

explaining

- the purpose of each interview, how it will be organised and recorded, whether it will be placed in a repository, and what interviewees will receive after the interview, such as a copy of the tape, transcript or planned publication

- oral history copyright, the implications of assigning copyright to another party, and the rights of interviewees to have a say in the use of their material by asking for anonymity and/or placing restrictions on use of the interview during their lifetime

- possible future use of interviews by all parties involved such as the interviewer, interviewee, and a repository

giving each interviewee an agreement to sign which clearly states whether the interviewee will retain copyright or assign it to another party and under what conditions assignment of copyright is granted; any change in use not covered in the original agreement would need to be renegotiated

conducting interviews with objectivity, honesty and integrity

being aware of defamation laws and the implications, for all parties concerned, of recording potentially defamatory material

treating every interview as a confidential conversation until an interviewee gives the right to share information through an agreement

ensuring that interviewees are given the opportunity to review, correct and/or withdraw material

ensuring that interviews are preserved for future researchers by, if possible, placing them in a repository under conditions agreeable to the interviewee.

Oral History Association of New South Wales Handbooks and Contacts

Some useful Handbooks

Douglas, L., Roberts, A., and Thompson, R. *Oral History: A Handbook.* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1988.

Price, B. Famil *Memories: A guide to reminiscing.* State Library of NSW, Sydney , 1992.

Robertson, B. *Oral History Handbook. Third Edition.* OHAA (SA), Adelaide, 1994.

Some discussions on method and theory of oral history

Darian-Smith, K. and Hamilton, P. (eds). Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994.

Dunway, D. and Baum, Willa. *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology.* A.A.S.L.H., Nashville, 1984.

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Gluck, S.B. and Patai, D. (eds). *Women's Words.* Routledge, New York, 1991.

Lummis, T. *Listening to History.* H.E.D. Books, Canvey Island, 1987.

Portelli, A. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History.* State University of New York Press, Albany, 1991.

Thompson, P. *The Voice of the Past.* Second Edition. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988.

Oral History Association of Australia (OHAA)

For information about the OHAA (NSW) c/- Oral History Program, State Library of NSW, Macquarie St, Sydney, 2000.

Arch Nelson Reminisces about Adult Literacy

THE TRANSCRIPT OF ARCH NELSON'S ADDRESS AT THE ARMIDALE HISTORY OF ADULT LITERACY WEEKEND

Rosie approached me about this, and Darryl spoke to me, and suggested that I might explain to you how I came to be involved in the history weekend and in the Australian Council for Adult Literacy particularly.

As I mentioned yesterday, in 1971, I became a professorial fellow in Adult Education, I think I used the phrase yesterday, to my chagrin I became that, but that was done partly because Adult Education had been prospering too much in the University of New England, and there were people around about who became a bit frightened about this, that funds might be going to adult education rather than to X or Y or Z, around the campus. And perhaps it was partly my tactlessness, and the tactlessness of other people, that brought about this attitude. It was in 1976 that Zelman Cowan, who was our Vice-Chancellor then, made a memorable address as chairman of the Australian Association of Adult Education. Now, as is proper in these circumstances, he went to his then Director of Adult Education for assistance in writing this, and I helped him, and there was one memorable paragraph, where he said that Adult Education was of tremendous importance to Australia's future. It was so important that it should be expanded enormously, and if it were expanded to the extent that was necessary, it would be the most expensive branch of education in this country. Now that sort of statement was probably noted here and noted there, and the other situation that I think worried some of our colleagues, was that we had been going out and working in community development, and folk didn't quite know where this was going to lead. We were encouraging people to look at their own situation and make up their own minds as to what kind of education they want to have. I had discussions with committees around the campus before I went away. I thought they were pretty satisfactory.

In 1971, I went on sabbatical leave. Just before I left, we had two committees. One was a committee of council, the other was a committee of the professorial board, and they made some criticisms which I answered, and in the end, I think it was the committee of the professorial board that recommended the slight increase in staff in the department of Adult Education. I went away and when I was in London, I had a letter from Vice-Chancellor Darryl Lasenby saying 'Dear Arch, We've been thinking about the future of adult education, and we decided that you deserve a promotion. We have decided to make you a professorial fellow, because of your academic prominence in this field. It would be a great honour, would you accept?'

Well, I thought about this, and thought it wouldn't be a bad idea, and I could settle down and do some work, in studying adult education and still have an influence on policy within the University. But when I came back I found I was to make a study of adult education, and was to have very little to do with practice, and that was a great disappointment to me because I was deeply interested in the practice of adult education as well as the theory.

Because I was a professorial fellow, and I was the only academic proper working in adult education in Australia at the time, I got numerous requests from around the world for this kind of job and that kind of job. If I hadn't had so many requests I might have spent more time looking at the local situation and being critical of it.

One request that I had, was from the International Association for Adult Literacy Methods, which at the time was located in Persia. They said we want to do a summary

of adult education experience in Australia and would you do it for us? I gladly agreed to this, and as a result of that, two issues of *Literacy Discussion*, (you are probably familiar with *Literacy Discussion)*, were issues about the Australian experience. I didn't know much about literacy practice, but Brian Preen was here on the staff of the Teachers' College at the time and he guided me on this, and I talked to him about whom I should contact, and I probably missed out a number of important people, but I got some people who were very good.

I think these two editions paint quite a good picture of adult education and adult literacy in Australia. The people who contributed, I had the temerity to put in a forward, a historical note about adult literacy in Australia, and the history of adult literacy is very interesting indeed. Major McConichee came out here with the first fleet that came out here to NSW, and he had charge of a depot on Norfolk Island, I think, it was, for the really incorrigible convicts. He was a reformer and practiced adult education with them, gave them literacy classes and so on, and for his pains was sent back to England, reprimanded and sent home. These people were sent out to NSW, not to be educated, not to be helped, but to be punished for their sins back home in the old country.

Lorna Lipton, wrote on literacy and ethnic problems and A. Gray, Alistair Gray I think it was. Brian Preen on Adult Literacy in a literate society, and A.J. Pierce who is a member of our staff here wrote something for me. Don Nelson wrote On Reflections on an Adult Literacy Pilot Project, Nancy Shelley, wrote An Approach to Innumeracy, Geoff Falkenmire on Operation Literacy-Research and Action Among Adults in NSW. Judith Goyen on The Incidences of Adult Illiteracy in the Sydney Metropolitan Area, and then I had the temerity to do a summary and prospects, to make some prophecies about the future of adult literacy in Australia.

Now, soon after I did this job, in 1975, I went to a meeting of the Australian Association of Adult Education, I think it was in Adelaide, and they had a little working party on Adult Literacy. Now as I have just done this I joined this working party and I was genuinely informed, and I found myself being able to answer questions, and I knew quite a good deal about it . They said you are just the man we want as chair of this association, that is the answer to the question of how I became chairman. I accepted.

Why did I accept? Well, even though I hadn't been involved in adult literacy, I had been interested in it for a long time. I had been brought up among people who were semi-literate, up in the Adelaide Hills, in those days I should say about fifty percent of the population of adults were semi-literate. I had a great respect for them all, they were friends of mine, the man who lived in the small block behind us was quite illiterate. I went to school in grade one, and I remember walking through his garden with, the First Primer, the hat, cat, mat and he said 'What have you got there Archie?' I said, ' I've got a book, a reading book from school.' He then said 'Could I have it please when you have finished with it at the end of the year.' It was quite pathetic, and there were a number of people around with similar inclinations to want to learn to read and to write. I remember old Vince Glynn when radio came in. I remember when radio came in after World War One, and the hall next door to our school they put in a radio. They had a young man working there, who was not only a carpenter but an enthusiast for radio, and the whole school gathered around at twelve o'clock, to hear the GPO chimes in Adelaide on the radio. There was one telephone, that was at my home, but here we had something that was magical coming over the air without the benefit of lines. There they were - the GPO chimes from Adelaide. There were lots of people around about who had a desire to read and write and they were my friends, and I thought, well, it would be good to help people and I am very willing to become chairman of this council.

During my time as a primary school teacher, I remember the first school I had

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One triumph that I had was that in my third group I had the wife of the local Methodist parson, and I understand that my lectures where relayed from the pulpit.

was up at Copperhouse Borough. I remember our efforts to make people literate there and my mind harks back to my days at school, when we had an excellent teacher, a fellow called Sylvester Smith, who was very fond of language. He was a poet and he taught us spelling, reading and grammar in the formal way that it was taught then, but he also gave us poetry. I remember how much we enjoyed the poems, how much I enjoyed Wordsworth, from old Smithy and when I went to Copperhouse, I made a point of emphasising poetry.

The normal practice of the morning was to have a spelling test. Youngsters would learn their spelling the night before or on the way to school. I would say in the morning, 'Should we have a poem before we have spelling?', and they would all say, 'Yes sir', and we would have a poem, and some of the little devils would have their spelling book under the desk, learning up all the words that they hadn't learnt the night before. They enjoyed poetry, and in our discussion yesterday it occurred to me that one thing that we ought not to forget is that language is an enjoyable thing.

I think back now to some of the kids that I taught. There were two for example - the Lockett family. It was just about impossible to make these two kids literate, but I don't think it mattered so very much, because Peter Lockett was very good with horses and he was very good on the farm, and his sister was a delightful girl. When I went back to the Borough, I said is Peter Lockett still here, and my informant said, 'Oh yes, he was in town in his Jag the other day'. So he was doing pretty well on the farm, despite the fact that he could neither read nor write and certainly couldn't spell. I had a strong feeling for these people.

Now in my army days, I started out first of all as a private in the Army Education Service in Adelaide. There is a story behind that. I remember going over to the GDD, at the showgrounds in Adelaide, they had a Colonel in charge, he was a stiff old devil, and I saluted him as one had to in the army, and I said, 'Private Nelson, Sir, from the Army Education Service'. He said, 'I'm playing with the education people, but what do they do by sending me a bloody Private'. I said, 'I wasn't a Private before I came into the army Sir, and I hope that you will judge me on my performance after rather than before'. I must say to his credit that after we had finished, and after I had talked to his troops, there were about 400 of them, heading out to New Guinea, he escorted me to the lectern and saluted me first of all. I could go on talking about army experiences for a long time, but eventually I was given a special job, as I had been involved in adult education during my civil days. I graduated with honours in History, as a part time student as I was teaching at the schools. And immediately on graduation I was given the job as a part time tutor, in the WEA tutorial class system in Adelaide, I had three classes. One was at the University itself, were mature people came in and discussed the present clash of political ideals, this was just before the war. I had a beaut class down at Port Adelaide. It was very small and we discussed capitalism and its critics and concentrated on Karl Marx, and one of my students went on to become the Federal Treasurer afterwards, the others I think enjoyed the course and that was all that mattered. One triumph that I had was that in my third group I had the wife of the local Methodist parson, and I understand that my lectures where relayed from the pulpit.

Let me not meander on, let's get back to the army situation. As I went around training officers in discussion methods, (that was a job I was given especially), I found there was an understandable reluctance on behalf of officers to run discussions with their men, on the basis of the current affairs bulletin that was send out. (The editor of that by the way was one Duncan who wrote the Duncan Report.) The attitude of officers often was, particularly up in New Guinea, who is this so and so who has come from LHQ, they all assumed that I had come from Melbourne, to teach us all how to look after our troops. What could he tell us, we'll show him.

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I remember one group, it was a military maintenance group, just up from Lae, the UEO, the Unit Education Officer. He was a part time fellow, marched in a whole bunch of fellows. I'm pretty sure at least a half of them or perhaps more than that were quite illiterate, or sub-literate. I think he picked out, how shall I put it, the least advanced of the people in the unit, this was to test me out and see how they went. They were wonderful, glorious.

My general feeling about illiterates in the army is one of gratitude to them, because this sort of pattern was not uncommon. The people who didn't have very much learning were brought in to see how this so and so from LHQ would get along with them, they generally responded pretty well. And the feeling in the army towards the illiterate was not bad generally on the part of the troops. In the army the feeling was that in a unit the sub literate or the completely illiterate felt comfortable. Old Joe, you know, he can't read or write but he is not a bad sort of a bastard is he, that was the sort of attitude that people adopted, and they got along well with the rest.

There were some units in which effective work was done. In literacy, for example, I went to Singleton, to their training depot up there. I went to their little high school, and met the headmaster, who was a Mr Najerick, he was the brother of the Colonel in charge of the army education service, who became the Vice-Chancellor at UNE afterwards. He said, 'We've been helping people from the army depot over there, the illiterates, we run a class for them. What I'm struck by is their pathetic gratitude, for what is being done for them'. The advantage I think that people had in the army was that there was an organisation, there was a structure, a ready made sort of structure from which communities could develop. Within those communities it was possible to do something for the people for whom you worked. I got into that from telling you why I was so willing to come in and work with the ACAL. I think it has been, and you'd agree, a successful organisation, evidently so, I think.

I did find that I got a reputation well beyond my desserts you know, for being a person who knew all about literacy. Sir John Carrick, was the Minister for Education at that time. When I went away on holiday, I had a call from the local Post Office. I had a call to come to the phone, 'the Minister for Education wants to talk to you about literacy.' I felt a bit of a fraud because I didn't really feel I was up on this area. I had learned a bit from people like you with whom I was associated, but never the less I think I told them the things that I ought to have told them. I think I told them it was tremendously important for example, that more funds ought be allocated. I think it was about this time that we did get a lift in funds, and a lift in prestige.

Only the other day in a meeting that we held here in Armidale, on the past of Adult Education, I met the local member Ian Sinclair, who was a member of cabinet at about that time. He said, 'You know, Arch, what we did here for literacy was a wonderful thing, and it all started here in Armidale, didn't it?' That kind of attitude, on the part of politicians is to their advantage, and may it go on.

Now going back to what I was saying about army communities, my hope has always been that we could develop the kind of community in which literacy mattered. One of my regrets from moving out of the practical work in adult education in 1971, was that I was not able to go on and follow up the work we had been doing in community development and apply it into literacy fields, that would have been magnificent.

In 1971, I travelled through India, I went around and talked enthusiastically. I was there for about three months. I gave lectures and seminars at universities and so on. Looking through some of the mail that came afterwards, it was all very warm. I had gone around telling them of the wonderful things we were doing here in New England in community development and how we hoped to apply this on the literacy scene.

Many things come to mind as I'm talking.

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I would like to emphasise that I had hoped that this university [UNE] would be more active in literacy than it is now, and it would have expanded staff, in order to be able to do a good job. Not taking over literacy, by no means, but by giving support help and inspiration.

One thing is that when I talk this way people become sometimes frightened. I know that you don't but people who don't understand say, here is the university taking over adult education, which is nonsense. The university has a particular function in adult education, a specialised sort of leadership, to help with research, and teaching and experimental work. In 1966 for example, the Universities Commission passed a resolution to the effect. It was dreadful, a dreadful statement. Academics are sometimes very bad writers. People who work for the Universities Commission are no exception. I worked for them for awhile, and in this recommendation the government came out saying that no more money should go to universities for adult education, that adult education was something that should be looked after be the Colleges of Advanced Education, or the Technical Colleges. It was not the province of the university, and that all funding should be cut off.

I met Ian Sinclair in a cafe down here for a couple of hours and talked about this, and he was horrified, because he had seen the kind of work that we were doing. He said, 'Look Arch, when people question the value of putting universities in productive places, if you could see what the University of New England has done for the small places in New England, you would have no doubts about the value of this sort of thing'. I said, 'Ian if you could see what this small place has done to university staff, in broadening their outlook, and making them more human, you'd have no doubt either about putting universities in these places'.

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I would like to emphasise that I had hoped that this university [UNE] would be more active in literacy than it is now, and it would have expanded staff, in order to be able to do a good job. Not taking over literacy, by no means, but by giving support help and inspiration. When I first came here I talked to [the Vice-Chancellor] about the very diverse program that we had. I said, 'Surely, Vice- Chancellor there are many things that ought to be done by somebody else, by the technical colleges and so on and so on'. He said, 'Arch but are they doing them, surely it is up to us to show the way, then to pass it over', and that has been our general policy here.

Now to get back to the ACAL, and our function. The first national conference of ACAL was held in 1976, and the fourth National Conference was held in 1980, and it was at that that I think we made a fairly distinct advance. We had a small group. I gave a talk there on finance. My principle function in relation to the Council was to lobby, to talk to political people, to get them to understand what our work was all about. At the fourth conference we reached a stage were we would talk about these things. I gave a talk on finance, on the getting of funds, on the funds that we would need for the future. Then we had a small working party, and that working party formulated a submission to go to the government to ask for money. That submission was, I think, quite successful.

One thing before I close in this very general and wandering talk, is to say that we were floundering a bit in the first year as I recall for lack of secretarial assistance. We had a gentleman from the Office of Education, which had by this time moved to Canberra, George Harvey. He was quite helpful, but he was a long way away from headquarters which became Armidale, and so I prevailed on Darryl Dymock to take over the secretaryship which he did and I hope he hasn't regretted it. He certainly made a wonderful contribution. I think the secretary and chairman business is often completely out of focus. It is the chairman who gets all the credit and sits in the front seat, and it's the secretary who does all the work and often corrects all the errors of the chairman. That was very much the function of Darryl as Secretary.

I went on as chairman until 1984 when I stepped down and I became patron for a little while, but shortly after that I suggested we rotate the office of patron and we had some quite distinguished people in. One was Kim Beazley, the father of the present Kim Beazley. I remember meeting Kim Beazley senior in

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Western Australia, when I went over to the army. Fred Alexander who was Professor of History and Director of Adult Education for the university was also Major in charge of army education. He said 'Lieutenant Nelson, this is young Beazley, young Beazley', he said, 'works for me, he is doing a wonderful job while I am engaged in army work, but he wants to go into politics, and I think it would be most unwise, don't you?' I didn't hazard an opinion at all.

But, we were helped considerably by the sort of patrons that we had. Another thing that I wanted to invite your attention to; I stepped down in 1984, as I felt I had been chairman long enough. In 1989, over the years I had still been interested, I had wrote a thing called *My Dear Ministers* . Unfortunately, soon after writing it, I had a minor stoke, and that prevented me from going on and doing the kind of work that I wanted to do. What I wanted to do, was to get groups around about as I had thought of many years ago, discussing this *My Dear Ministers* thing, and lodging their opinions and sending them back to me. I was going to prevail on the university to help me in this regard, because they did have provision for discussion groups. I got all sorts of responses, many of them were critical, but they were generally very interested indeed. There was one I would like to read here just for interest's sake. It came from an old fashioned teacher, a man called Mr Stromm. He was running a class up in Byron Bay, now you've probably heard of Byron Bay, it is a place were a lot of people do extraordinary things. My daughter lives there as a matter of fact.

'Dear Arch Nelson, Reference page 61', [he is referring to *My Dear Ministers*.] The reason for the title *My Dear Ministers*, by the way, is I emphasised the fact that we shouldn't leave education to ministers or to teachers. Education is the responsibility of us all, and I emphasised in the letter that we shouldn't look to the teachers to do all the work in this area. The parents should take responsibility too.

I look back to my days at Copperhouse, and it was the kids that came from homes that were supportive, who were doing well. It wasn't entirely my efforts. I remember one bright little boy, (I wonder how he got on?) I had a monitor working with me then, he was a bright little kid, he came forward with pertinent things. One day he said he said ' Sir, I think you're a bit keen on Ms Steel aren't you?'. She was the monitor in this building, and I was, as a matter of fact. I said 'Yes, of course I am and so are you, and so are we all.' That was the best answer that I could give. Now you see, I wonder how Hallsy got on in life, because his home background wasn't at all conducive to literacy. If I went back there now, I don't think he would be anything like a professor, or a teacher, though he might be a successful business man, because he was quite perceptive about things. But that's just by the by. Now let's get on with this, *My Dear Ministers* thing.

> Dear Arch Nelson, whether you like to acknowledge it or not the prime cause of illiteracy is in our schools. The law says that attendance at learning institutions from X years until Y years, by every child is compulsory, for the understood reason of becoming literate. To learn to read. If a kid doesn't learn, it means someone hasn't taught him. The end result will be an adult who can't read, yes it can be argued that schools are very successful, because 80% qualify, but what of the 20%? You must realise that there are kids in the classrooms who are there in body only, their minds are somewhere else, beyond the room."

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Now I don't think I will read the whole of this to you, as it is rather long. He goes on to say, what we want is really dedicated teachers, and if we had them, then we would be alright. He told me what he was doing. He had about eighty youngsters, who were not getting along well at school. They weren't learning to read, and he was giving them more or less coaching, and he was very successful in doing this and acknowledged in doing so by all of the

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parents. And what was my reply to him? I said,' Yes I congratulate you on this, but didn't the parents bring them along? Weren't the parents concerned enough to see that they came to you. And didn't you tell me in your letter, that the parents came along and listened to what you were doing? That was the important thing'.

The other thing, that if I had more time I was going to mention to you, was that I had another literacy experience during my earlier time at [the University of] New England. I went out to Ethiopia, during my first sabbatical leave, and I had to report for UNESCO on the state of adult education. It was in the days of Haile Salasie. I spent about ten weeks there, it was not unpleasant, and I met up with some quite inspiring people. I remember one sister from the church school who was doing something with the community. I remember the Director of Primary Schools, who was quite an inspiring person who went out and worked in communities. And I remember of all things, the anger of Haile Salasie.

When [the four of us in the delegation] had finished we had to appear before Haile Salasie. There was a room full of people, I think it was set up as an occasion, quite a big room. All of us walked down. We were given instructions before hand that we had to address him as your imperial majesty, which we did, to our discredit I think. We had to bow three times going in and going out we had to walk backwards and bow three times, which we did, to our discredit again.

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Anyway, my three colleges were thanked very much for their efforts, I thought this was not bad, he was sort of congratulating them and thanking them. And then he came to me, I had been reporting on adult education, and he said 'Mr Nelson, I read your report. You come from Australia don't you?', and I said 'yes'. He said, 'You have said some critical things about my country, do mind if I say some critical things about yours?'. And I said 'Not at all, your imperial majesty.' He said, 'Why is it that Ethiopians are not admitted into Australia?' He was thinking of the White Australia Policy, and I said, 'That is news to me, your imperial majesty. When I left my country we had six, highly esteemed Ethiopian students in our university. They are terribly well regarded, and they have certainly been admitted to the country, if the law has changed since I have left I should be very perturbed, and if you would wish me to, your imperial majesty, I will make representations on your behalf to my government.' 'Oh no, leave it as a matter between man and man.'

My reflection on that has been since, that it would have been a good thing....what he was objecting to in my report, was that I had recommended that people in country places and in city places too, should have more say about the kind of education that they had. You see he was using education, adult education in particular in order to consolidate his power. Wouldn't it have been sensible for Salasie to have taken notice when he talked to me, and other people? And to have gone to the people and endeavoured to assist them, to set up there own institutions, there own committees for education? That happened afterwards. I heard through the SBS, World Live, in 1973.

I don't pretend to be an expert on Ethiopia, but I have read a little bit since I was there, and I have noticed this. Of course there was havoc in the early '70s. In 1974 Salasie was tossed out, and in '77, the people who tossed him out were overthrown by Mengiscu, in an army revolution. The first army were a group, I think was fairly fascist, the second one was communist, in outlook. But, I think the SBS publication was accurate, education was free, and each school was controlled by peasants or urban dwellers associations, which was precisely the thing I was putting up to Haile Salasie in 1962. A major literacy campaign was launched in 1979, and by 1987 the adult illiteracy rate had repeatedly been reduced from 93%, to 39%. So something was done about illiteracy and at the same time the government consolidated its power, and I think I will leave it at that.

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[And, later, expanding on his comments and the 2 Volume publication *Literacy Discussion*, Arch went on to quote from his summary in that publication and to add extra comments.]

For certain segments of our population, while pluralism continues to be ignored, while methods of teaching remain unrelated to the student's reality, while bureaucracies continue to legislate what it is that people must learn, this is a bit like Haile Salasie, isn't it, really? While teachers continue to grow cynical rather than critical about the effectiveness of their teaching, our society will have great need of community based teaching networks. And I quote Nancy Shelly, who is a teacher of teachers and has done interesting work on the teaching of mathematics to women. I'll put in her suggestions for the future.
"An approach which denies the history of the development of mathematics, and ignores the role of the inspired guess, of intuitive developing and the creative leap, is blind to how the learning process takes place". She deplores this.

Geoffrey Falkenmire, talks about a large program of adult literacy training provided by the Ministry of Education. He identifies three groups for whom provision was made: native born Australians, who are deficient in literacy skills; illiterate migrants; and adults whose illiteracy was related to physical or intellectual handicap. The most encouraging thing about these articles, and those presented in the last issue of Literary Discussion, was their sensible optimism.

I come now to consideration of the very valuable and interesting paper by Dr Judith Goyen, which was commissioned later and arrived after I had written, the foregoing part of this summary. I preferred not to revise my summary statement to incorporate Dr Goyen's findings, but rather to add a postscript relating some of the points raised, to the evidence brought forward by Dr Goyen. The figures produced in Dr Goyen's survey are interesting. The functional literacy rate of 43.3% for adult migrants, from non English speaking backgrounds, contrasts so markedly with the rate of 3.7% of adults born in Australia. I don't believe most of the figures I see about literacy you know, really I don't. The Philips Atlas of the World, gives us a 97% literacy rate, which I think is nonsense. People exaggerate them the way that they want to.

I'll return to this question of the barely functional, because it seems to me to be of amazing importance, because the Goyen findings may well underline its importance. I have always thought this was tremendously important you know. There are people who are literate but who are not really functional in society. This is one of the dangers I think about university populations. There is a danger, and I stress this about universities in country places. University teachers become isolates, working unto themselves, and knowing more and more about less and less, and come to be thought of by their fellows, in the rural places in which they are functioning, as isolates, who hold a very colourful ceremony once a year, in which they award themselves degrees and so on, dressed up in medieval costumes. That is a danger, unless there is an effective program of adult education and community development coming from universities.

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And, this business of whether you are functional or barely functional remains very much to the question of continuing education. Without some sort of continuing education, I think dialogue is the important thing here, continual talking, sifting ideas and so on, then people are not going to be more than barely functional. Women probably are doing better in this regard than men at the moment. I am trying to be controversial here, a little. The women's movement has probably helped quite a lot, because women get together and talk, in the past they used to have more time to do this than they do now. This I suppose is the point of the present men's movement, the one that Steve Biddulp is concerned with. That men should become more caring, more understanding than they are, and that women have achieved this through getting together and talking and understanding each other. There is an affective thing, that's the right word I think isn't it, that you develop emotionally as well as intellectually. Women have achieved this more effectively than men. I tell my family that my greatest achievement in life was to secure for them a very loving, and very lovable mother and grandmother. That's more important than all the intellectual things that I might or might not have done.

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Emerging research questions

The following list of topics is a distillation of the ideas raised during a brainstorming session after Janis Wilton's workshop. The list is intended to give an overview of the range of topics which could be taken up (and reformulated) in future research projects investigating the history of adult literacy in Australia. The list reflects the brainstorming nature of the session: it includes questions which could be asked as well as tasks which could be done. The topics are inter-related; many questions could be asked under more than one heading.

Mapping the major (and minor events) in adult literacy's history from 1973

What was the impact of funding from the National Policy on Languages (1987) and the subsequent Adult Literacy Action Campaign (ALAC)?
How did the impact vary in each state and territory?
What sort of other regional and state variations exist?
What were the sources of funding prior to NPL?
Where did programs happen?
What sort of resources were available to the field?
How did this change with funding?
What have been the impact of more recent policy and funding changes?
Map the relationship between adult literacy's development in Australia and the development of language and literacy policies.
When were the first adult literacy classes held in each state and territory?
By whom?
Where?
What were the composition of classes?
What sort of teaching materials were used?
What role did volunteers and 1:1 tutoring play in this initial provision?
How has provision changed over time?
What outcomes were valued at different periods?
What worksites existed for teachers at different periods?
Where were teachers placed in hierarchies and decision-making processes?
What philosophies and political attitudes have affected adult literacy in the last 20 years?
What values have underpinned adult literacy pedagogy and research methodologies?
What have been the changing paradigms which have organised the field (eg. social justice, progressivism, economic rationalism).
Map the substantive changes in rhetoric in different sectors.
Ask people about their perceptions of the key moments in adult literacy's history.
Who has benefited and who has 'lost out' with the changes over time?

Rosie Wickert and Trish Branson

Adult literacy teaching as work: Charting the development of the adult literacy profession

How has the nature of adult literacy teaching changed over the last 20 years?
Why?
What factors have influenced these changes?
Who have been the key players in facilitating or challenging changes?
For example, what roles have been played by professional associations (the state councils and ACAL), by unions, by systems and policy makers, by academics?
What have been the changes in working conditions and status?
Capture some individual stories from the 'long time servers' in adult literacy.
What were their experiences?
What was their 'career path'?
Did they see adult literacy teaching as a career?
What do adult literacy teachers *need* to know?
What are they *expected* to know?
What is the history of professional development and teacher education for adult literacy teachers?
That is, what sort of training has been available to them over the last 20 years and how do you 'get qualifications' in adult literacy?
What is the content of professional development and teacher education courses?
How appropriate have they been to teachers' work?
What registration processes, if any, exist, officially or unofficially?
Create a 'timeline of credentialism' (ie, map entry requirements of employers and university courses).
Chart the statements of informing principles to be found in the mission statements of providers and professional associations.
What is the role of voluntarism in the history of adult literacy?
What are its origins and its impact?
What is the relationship between provision by volunteers and that by trained teachers?
What are the issues and tensions associated with this relationship?
How has provision of adult literacy varied between different providers or systems?
What has been the role of public and private providers?
What has been the impact of the emergence of 'newer' providers (such as SkillShare and private providers) in adult literacy?
When does the term 'profession' or 'professional' start to emerge?
What changes have taken place in the naming of the field and the professional associations associated with the 'adult literacy profession'?
Who is 'inside' and who is 'outside' the adult literacy profession?
Who perceives or decides whether there is a profession and who the insiders and outsiders are?
What are the shared understandings between different players?
What are the differences or gaps in understanding?
What assumptions or 'baggage' does the notion of 'profession' rest on?
Where did funds come from for the so-called 'professionalising' of adult literacy?
What are the professional boundaries between adult literacy and related 'professions' or areas such as TESOL, Communication, child or school literacy, adult education?
What are the backgrounds of adult literacy teachers?
What, if any, barriers have they experienced in their teaching?

Adult literacy in different forums and different sectors

How does adult literacy get framed in different forums?
By whom?
Why?
How and why is adult literacy on the public and policy agendas?
What is the role of adult literacy in adult education? in community education? in education and training for the unemployed?
Who represents adult literacy at forums and on committees?
Who participates in the decision-making processes which affect adult literacy?
What were and are the dialogues between different stakeholders (teachers, students, policy makers, professional associations, program managers and administrators)?
Describe the nexus between state and federal governments and other agencies.

The role of professional associations

What role do professional associations play in the history of adult literacy?
How and when was each state council established?
What involvement, if any, did the associations have in professional development?
Map the changing face of the national ACAL conference - eg, who were the presenters? the participants? what topics or themes were covered? what other fields were involved (eg, ESL)?
Map the appearance and disappearance of adult literacy students' participation at national and state conferences.
Write case studies of the various associations (ACAL, ALF, the state and territory councils).

International perspectives

What are the similarities and differences between adult literacy in Australia and overseas?
What has been the role of UNESCO internationally and, in particular, what impact has UNESCO has on the Australian context?
What influences have come from overseas?
What links have been made?

Bill Green, Trish Branson and Chris Campbell

Abstracts

Compiled by
ROSIE WICKERT

1. Deborah Tyler and Lesley Johnson (1991)
Helpful Histories?
History of Education Review 20.2. 1 - 8.

The paper by Deborah Tyler and Lesley Johnson, which is the introduction to a special issue of the *History of Education Review*, is included for those readers who are interested in exploring Foucault 'on history'. In it the writers explain the concept of the 'history of the present' and the "challenge this represents to others conceptions and methods of making histories". A discussion of feminist approaches to history is drawn on to illustrate these differences and to emphasise how the history of the present approach does the important work of analysing how a particular category such as 'woman' [or literate] is "constructed in different contexts rather than assuming it as a stable category of analysis." Histories of the present, they explain, "pay attention to specificities and contingencies, and thus examine the production of our current realities rather than seeking to explain or interpret them in their terms."

2. John Hodgens (1994)
How adult literacy became a public issue in Australia,
Open Letter 4.2. 13 - 24.

This article developed from an extensive documentary history project about "how public debates over literacy and education have been used to forward different versions of appropriate behaviour, different versions of the ideal literate and citizen" (Green, Hodgens and Luke forthcoming). (The history of that project of itself is worthy of the telling but will have to wait for another time.) The article is an historical review and uses documentary evidence to argue that the 'literacy crisis', for both adults and children, appears to have been 'constructed' in the 1970s as a response to "the shifting social order and its perceived impact on the formation of the character of young people". The various ways through which such claims were 'made' are discussed as are attempts to seek a cause or lay blame. What emerges from this is the 'deficiency thesis', the legacy of which persists today.

3. Bill Green, John Hodgens & Allan Luke (Eds) (1994)
Introduction: *Debating literacy in Australia:*
A documentary history, 1945 - 1994.
Available from the Australian Literacy Federation, PO Box 78, Carlton South, Vic 3053

This piece is the introduction to an extensive collection of material that has been collected to provide a documentary history of literacy debates in Australia since 1946. The authors discuss the concept of literacy and demonstrate how its meaning shifts and changes depending on the context and purpose of its use. They argue that 'literacy' can be understood as a codeword used to support different political positions and that, given that literacy is a social and historical construction, it is illogical to use it to support notions of 'decline' or 'crisis' in any absolute sense. They conclude by stressing that teachers need to understand the constructedness of the concept of literacy and apply this understanding to critical examinations of what and how they teach.

4. Darryl R. Dymock (1993)
'Fall Out the Illiterates'
- Lessons from a World War II Adult Literacy Program.
***Open Letter* 3.2 53 - 66.**

In this paper, Dymock outlines how the Australian Army responded to its dawning awareness of literacy difficulties among wartime enlisted servicemen and also how these difficulties were used as scapegoats for all kinds of other 'problems'. In it he provides a fascinating glimpse into pedagogic, testing and assessment practices (including personality and attitude assessment) and also the growing influence of the 'principles of adult education'. His discussion on the outcomes of these programs echoes much of what we hear today and provides yet more evidence of the complexities of understanding literacy and numeracy difficulties and what should be considered as successful learning outcomes.

5. Darryl R. Dymock.
'An issue of significant community concern': the postwar development of adult literacy policy and provision in Australia.
In Suzanne McConnell and Aileen Treloar. Eds. (1993) *Voices of Experience: Changes and Challenges*, Canberra: DEET.

As the title suggests, this paper is an account of the postwar development of adult literacy policy and provision in Australia until the adoption of the ALLP in 1991. It charts, for the first time to my knowledge, the contribution of a number of federal government enquiries to the developing awareness of the need to act. Alongside this, the work of the professional associations is reported as is the uneven growth in provision. As this information is organised by decade, it easy to access and follow. The final section comments on the changing directions of adult literacy policy and provision as adult basic education takes a more central position in mainstream education and training agendas. The paper closes with a plea that adult literacy not overlook its 'intelligent and compassionate attitudes and relationships' in its desire for a more 'professional' approach.

6. James A. Draper (1991)
A Selected Chronology of Literacy Events.
In Maurice C. Taylor and James A. Draper Eds. (1991) *Adult Literacy Perspectives* Culture Concepts: Ontario.

This piece is included to show that other countries are also beginning to document the history of their adult literacy provision. Even a simple chronology of events is an important task to undertake. In this extract, James Draper provides a context to the chronology of events in Canada and a way of reading them as 'more than a series of unrelated events'. In his view, such a chronology "expresses a complicated interrelationship between social forces, the creation and sharing of ideas, the needs of governments and individuals, and humanitarian goals, human suffering and deprivation". Such a view presents us with quite a challenge if an Australian chronology is to speak with such power.

Background Readings

"Helpful Histories"
Deborah Tyler and Lesley Johnson
History of Education Review Volume 20, No 2, 1991

Historical writings drawings on the work of Michael Foucault have recently begun to have some impact in the field of eduction. A number of articles have appeared in this journal in the past five years, for instance, which have referred to Foucault in some way or sought to develop Foucauldian framework. Similarly, Marjorie Theobald and R. J. W. Selleck, in their recent edited collection of essays on the history of education, acknowledge work drawing on Foucault as constituting a significant development in discussions about the history of mass compulsory schooling.[1] But, thus far, little debate has occurred in such arenas about the place of history in Foucault's work and the challenge this represents to other conceptions of and methods of making histories. It is hoped that this special issue of the *History of Education Review* on 'the history of the present' may serve to promote such a debate.

The term 'history of the present' is connected with the work of Michel Foucault, although it is not a term that he especially privileges. Foucault at different times describes his approach to making histories as 'genealogy', 'effective history', 'criticism', 'diagnosing the present', or, more simply perhaps, as intellectual work which uses historical investigations as a tool.[2] This proliferation of terms is frustrating for those concerned to find 'Foucault on history' in the sense of some simple and straightforward definition of the place of historical writing in his work. But, whether Foucault is writing of the tasks of the intellectual or defending the work of criticism, he offers a consistent enough set of remarks on his thinking about historiographical problems.

A second clarification is needed. Just as Foucault does not adopt a single term to describe his approach to the making of histories, nor does his work include single, coherent piece which explains that approach. 'Foucault on history' circulates through his interviews and essays mainly through repeated calls to expand the boundaries of possible approaches to contemporary problems by using historical investigations to permit a thinking of those problems in different ways. It is this understanding of the use of history which has come to be understood as the project of the 'history of the present'. The term has come to have a certain currency amongst those writers influenced by Foucault's historiography; it points to a particular project, as well as a methodology to be used.

What then is meant by 'history of the present'? To summarise. First, histories of the present take as their starting point questions posed in the present and seek to make the terms through which those problems are currently understood an object of inquiry.[3] Second, such histories attempt to work out the genealogy, or line of descent, that has led to problems being posed in these ways.[4] Third, rather than a search for foundations or origins, a genealogy attends to the precise, sometimes mundane, historical changes that give the present its shape.[5] Fourth, rather than disclosing an unbroken continuity that has led to a particular problem being posed in its contemporary clothing, which has the effect of producing a sense of inevitability, the recourse to history is meaningful to the extent that 'history serves to show that -which-is has not always been... since these things have been made, they can be unmade'.[6] Fifth, the intended effects of histories of the present are to 'wear away' at certain commonplaces, to make some actions that are habitually performed open to reflection-'to dissipate what is familiar and accepted'.[7] In brief, the project of histories of the present can be understood as the making of histories that locate the present as a strange, rather than familiar landscape, where that which has gone without saying becomes problematic.

How then do histories of the present differ from other methods of making histories? Contemporary writing in the history of education commonly constructs its own history as having gone through a number of phases. Within these accounts it is generally now accepted, however, that contemporary preoccupations shape the writing of different histories in different times and places. But the role those preoccupations play is not necessarily clearly articulated nor accepted without considerable unease within the history of education or in other related fields of historical writing. Contemporary concerns are often viewed with suspicion or unease, seen as a necessary evil but potentially disabling in the production of good histories. We will address here a number of the issues raised by historians of education and by feminists writing about this question in order to clarify further the project of the history of the present. We look briefly at feminist writings in this context as one arena in which contemporary preoccupations are acknowledged more readily as legitimate both in the field of education and more generally. Our discussion of feminist approaches to history will thus serve to illustrate the difference between histories of the present and the work of those historians who simply want to acknowledge that their preoccupations in the present shape the way they ask questions of the past.

A major concern among historians of education in recent years has been that contemporary preoccupations, whether in the form of considerations about present-day issues or in the forefronting of theoretical frameworks, will do irrevocable damage, to the proper conduct of historical investigation. In this argument, good history maintains and recreates the past in its proper setting, displaying sensitivity to the past in itself, and leaves the matter there. New questions arrive on the historians' agenda through the work of historians in uncovering more 'evidence' about the past, not through new questions in the present. This view has been articulated by Gwyneth Dow in her criticism of the 'presentism' with which she charges many of those influenced by what she refers to as 'leftist sociology'.[8] Such work, she claims, is guilty of 'Working back from the present with today's attitudes, questions and hindsight applied to yesterday's problems produc[ing] anachronistic accounts that, by definition, cannot be regarded as history'.[9]

Dow does have a point: there is no doubt that some historians do read the present backwards onto the past. But it is difficult to sustain the case that those whose objects of inquiry lie in the present are more likely to do this than others. There is limit, too, to the degree to which allegations of 'presentism', which carry with them a view of history writing as concerned with the past, should be defended. Dow's view of the proper practice of history is a refusal of historical writing as an intellectual tool in the present. It fails to acknowledge the productive role of historiography by ignoring its part in shaping what counts as knowledge in the present, the boundaries between what is understood to be true and false. Nikolas Rose's analysis of histories of the psychological sciences illustrates this point:

authoritative texts of scientific history play a key role in constructing the image of the present day reality of the discipline...a role which indicated by the part they play in the training of every novitiate. They establish the unity of the science by constructing a continuous tradition of thinkers who sought to grasp the phenomena which form its subject matter...They police the boundaries of the discipline by their criteria of inclusion or exclusion.[10]

The failure to take account of the role of history writing in producing what counts as knowledge in the present works t0 diminish the significance of history writing as an intellectual practice, not to bolster it. Histories of the present seek to place these issues explicitly on the agenda.

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Discussions of the historiography of the history of education have, in recent years, mostly talked of the necessity to develop either better theories- ones which correct the blindness of past histories to questions such as those of gender- or more carefully nuanced and researched histories which will make for better theories.[11] Both these claims have rested on an assumption of the role of theory in history which histories of the present seek to question.

The first view understands history as performing the role of the critique of ideology. Social control approaches which set out to demonstrate the significance of class to the history of mass education exemplify such a view of history, as do more recent critiques of the failure of such histories to take account of the central importance of patriarchal relations. Miller and Davey, for instance, have argued that transformations in patriarchal relations in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are as important as transformations in class relations for explanations of the rise of compulsory schooling. Characterising this claim as hypothesis, they propose that it should be 'tested in the light of theoretically informed historical work on the state and patriarchal relations'.[12]

Such an approach sets out to use theory to interpret practices, institutions and vocabularies of the past. It claims to be able to read them for what they, in Nikolas Rose's words, 'reveal about fundamental processes or contradictions which they dissimulate or suppress'.[13] Rather than looking to understand how new ways of thinking and acting have been introduced into our reality- the ways in which we have come to think and act as we do- this approach to history (and theory) attempts to explain away these realities by reference to a more authentic or larger reality.[14]

Similarly, the argument made in various contexts that history of education should be committed to a more careful documenting of historical detail in order to make better theories does not question how our realities have been produced. Despite the unease expressed in such instances about the role of theory in history, these claims about the proper business of history do not necessarily make contemporary categories problematic.[15] Such writing about history fails to live up to its own claims about the importance of paying attention to specificity and contingency. This comment will be explained by turning now to look briefly at developments in feminist history and the issues raised for this area of work by histories of the present.

The distinctions between women's history and feminist history are now well rehearsed.[16] As already mentioned,

feminist history is one arena in which contemporary preoccupations are seen as legitimate. It is widely understood as concerned with rewriting history, scrutinising, in Judith Allen's terms, 'past interpretations of both ancient and more recent history' in the attempt to 'account for the present situation of women'.[17] Feminist history is necessarily political, Allen argues, directed by feminism as a political position.[18] She proposes that feminist historians should abandon history as it currently operates as an academic discipline. It is, she declares, too firmly committed to notions of what counts as legitimate evidence and to modes of interpretation which can only lead to representations of a masculine version of the past.[19] Yet, such radical calls for a different or better history for feminism, a history which will account for the present, rarely appear to question the terms in which we currently understand out problems in the present. The failure to undertake this task threatens to undermine the very project which writers like Allen define as central to the purposes of a feminist history: the foal of showing that 'patriarchal relations are not natural and inevitable, but contingent and changeable'.[20]

The work of Joan Wallach Scott is useful in explaining this point further. Scott makes a similar point to Allen about the necessity of challenging the discipline as it currently operates. She argues that feminists should pay attention to the 'assumptions, practices and rhetoric of the discipline' and to the way in which power relationships are constituted in the discipline itself.[21] But she calls for a feminist history which moves beyond accusations of male bias directed both at the practice of history and at the historical processes under examination. Drawing on the work of Foucault and Jacques Derrida, Scott argues, in particular, for greater attention t be paid to categories or concepts which we tend to treat unproblematicaly. In studying discrimination- relations of advantage and disadvantage in history- she suggests, we need to extend our analysis to the meaning of categories themselves: categories like class, worker, citizen, man, woman, and, we would add, the state. Such a focus, she says, will demonstrate the volatility, the variability and the contested nature of these concepts.[22]

This approach does not presuppose that interests operate, but sets out to document their emergence and production. Rather than seeking to explain or interpret events in terms of underlying class or gender interests, and thus assuming, as Nikolas Rose points out, that 'these interests pre-existed the events and determined their course and pattern', we should look to see the 'emergence of new ways of constituting one's own and other's interests, and new mobilisations of forces around them'.[23]

These comments, we suggest, indicate why a history of the present approach is important to feminist projects. This approach would ensure that feminist histories analysed how the category of 'woman' (or 'women') is constructed in different contexts, rather than assuming it as a stable category of analysis. Such an approach is essential if feminist history is to destabilise and challenge the categories of gender, rather than strengthen them. It is essential, too, to the project of demonstrating that gender relations are not natural and ahistorical, but contingent and changeable.

In the context of this issue of *History of Education Review* these comments about feminist history help to clarify the challenge which the history of the present approach constitutes to current debates about the historiography of Australian history of education. Histories of the present pay attention to specificities and contingencies, and thus examine the production of our current realities rather than seeking to explain or interpret the past in their terms. Approaches to history which wants to make better histories with better theories- or vice versa- do not necessarily question those realities. This, we suggest, limits both approaches in achieving their aims. This discussion of feminist history also underlines the distinctiveness and significance of the history of the present approach: its project of making the present strange rather than the past familiar and the challenge this represents to both traditional and contemporary understandings of the purposes and methods appropriate to the proper business of historical research.

In this issue of *History of Education Review* we publish five articles to illustrate the history of the present approach. In addition, we have commissioned two extended book reviews of key texts in this field, one of which looks at issues relevant to those interested in education, the other being specifically on education.

Two articles address contemporary debates in Australia about government control and the university. Bruce Smith examines the representations of the traditions of humanities teaching and of liberal education offered by contemporary academics as explanations of their contributions. He uses historical investigations to unsettle familiar accounts of the development of universities as institutions devoted to the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and organised around freedom of thought. Smith shows that the formation of the Australian university, and the place of the humanities within it, are more accurately understood as part of a larger educational campaign to reform and govern a colonial population. But he does not offer this as an alternative beginning for a smooth story leading inevitably to the present. Smith identifies a compels combination of compromise, failure and adjustment in the efforts of the humanities to defend their position in the university, as well as their integral place in strategies for the

government of the Australian population.

Rather than a past supportive of the notion that the humanities depend for their character and pedagogic outcomes on a separation form the concerns of government, Denise Meredyth finds reciprocal relationships between the two. In a move that is particularly relevant to readers of History of Education Review, she demonstrates her case by examining the emergence of the tutorial, a pedagogic practice privileged within the humanities and one that is commonly viewed as exemplifying their distance from the kinds of calculations made by government. Instead, Meredyth discovers the tutorial entering Arts faculties through the practices of the secondary school classroom, the exigencies of an explosion in tertiary student numbers and diverse levels of preparation, and the requirements of government for particular kinds of personnel.

Looking to a different set of problems, Jennifer Laurence questions the contemporary feminist strategy of seeking to reclaim and celebrate the nurturing female teacher. In both historical work and discussion of current issues in education, feminists frequently seek to juxtapose a bureaucratic, dehumanised, public sphere to authentic, nurturing, private sphere in which the female teacher reigns supreme. Laurence argues that 'such a strategy simply strengthens the categories and binary oppositions which have been so powerful in organising women's lives'. She examines a number of key historical documents to show how a very precise regime of love was devised to define and position the identity of the nurturing female teacher. The 'mother teacher'- as she calls her- is very much a regulated figure, produced by the developing education bureaucracy.

Two papers examine the formation of citizens suitable for the workings of advanced liberal democracies. Ester Faye examines how changes to the secondary education system in the 1950s have contributed to contemporary understandings of adolescents as having their future well-being tied to their identities as school students. Looking primarily at the increasing intervention of educational psychology in the Victorian state secondary education system in this period, she investigates the production of the adolescent as the developing democratic citizen and the secondary school as the site in which such individuals were supposed to be made. Gavin Kendall directs his attention to the ways that literacy has been recast from a dangerous capacity to a necessary attribute of the liberal democratic citizen, and to understanding the conditions that made possible this reversal of the place of literacy in the government of the population. He argues that shifts in conceptions of the reader- in what is involved in the acquiring of literacy- facilitated the emergence of the category of the 'child' as a distinct sector of the population. Changes during the seventieth and eighteenth century in notions of the relationship between the reader and the text reconceptualised reading as a complex activity. The child was simultaneously defined as a separate category of person, and as one who will have difficulty and must be helped to read.

In the first of the two book reviews commissioned for this issue of *History of Education Review*, David McCallum discusses the significance of Nikolas Rose's book, *Governing the Soul: The shaping of the private self*, for historians of education. This review augments the account we have given of the 'history of the present' and its usefulness to the history of education.

Finally, R.J.W. Selleck reviews Ian Hunter's book, *Culture and Government*. This work has begun to have considerable impact in the fields of cultural studies and contemporary social theory, but has not as yet been widely discussed in education circles. Hunter argues that contemporary pedagogical practices in English criticism emerged in the context of moves to establish a system of popular education as a means of forming the population into a modern citizenry. His claims challenge understandings of those practices which view their purpose as, for instance, the complete or harmonious development of human capacities.

In his review, Selleck raises questions about the language used in historical work influenced by Foucault. While not wishing to comment specifically on his points in relationship to Hunter's work, we believe this an important issue to be addressed here, even if only briefly. We consider it inevitable that an approach which sets out to break self-consciously with past frameworks will necessarily appear strange and awkward in its language. In part, a new approach needs to use unfamiliar language to find ways of speaking which are not inflected with precisely those past understandings and assumptions it wishes to challenge. In part, too, a new approach has to retrain its audiences, to require them to become accustomed to new ways and new terms. Thus, for instance, feminist historians have now generally trained the audience of historians to be at least familiar with the term 'gender' as it is currently used, even if they do not all accept the importance of its usage. But we acknowledge the importance of clarity and the need to explain the use of new terms or new usages of terms. These undertakings are necessary, both to make that training of the audience possible, and to pursue one of the central goals of the history of the present project- to investigate the specificity and contingent character of historical processes.

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NOTES:

[1] M.R. Theobald and R.J.W. Selleck (eds), *Family , School and State in Australian History*, Sydney, 1990, p. x.
[2] See, for example, the following essays and interviews by Michel Foucault: 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history' in Donald F. Bouchard (ed), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, New York, 1977, where the terms 'genealogy' and 'effective history' appear; 'Practising criticism' In L.D. Kritzman (ed.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*. New York, 1988, where this kind of activity is described as 'criticism'. The language of 'diagnosis' is used in 'Neitzche, genealogy, history' and in 'Critical theory/intellectual history' in Kritzman (ed.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*. This essay also describes historical investigations as a tool for intellectual work on the nature of the present.
[3] M. Foucault, 'The concern for truth: an interview by Francois Edwald', trans. A Sheridan, in Kritzman (ed.), p. 262.
[4] Foucault, 'The concern for truth'.
[5] Foucault, 'Nietzche, genealogy, history' ,pp. 146-7.
[6] Foucault, 'Critical theory/ intellectual history' ,p. 37.
[7] This is a common formulation in Foucault's work. See M. Foucault, 'Questions of method: An interview with Michel Foucault,' *Interview and Consciousness*, 'no. 8, 1981, pp. 11-12. The quotation is from, 'The concern for truth', p.263
[8] G. Dow 'Review article. Family history and educational history: towards an integration', *History Studies*, vol. 21, no. 84, 1985 pp. 429-30.
[9] Dow, p. 430
[10] N. Rose, 'Calculable minds and manageable individuals', *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 1 , no. 2, 1988, p. 180.
[11] See P. Miller and Davey, p. 21. 'Family formation, schooling and the patriarchal state', and M.R. Theobold and R.J. W. Selleck, 'Introduction', in Theobold and Selleck.
[12] Miller and Davey, p.21.
[13] N. Rose, 'Beyond the public/private division: Law, power and the family' in P. Fitzpatrick and A. Hunt, *Critical Legal Studies*, Oxford, 1990, p.68.
[14] These comments should not be read as suggesting that class and gender relations disappear in histories of the present. This issue will be discussed below in relation to feminist histories.
[15] For instance, Theobald and Selleck in their introduction to their new book on the family and the state in the history of education do not make the category of the state itself problematic, but seek to present different views of the state and different histories of its functioning.
[16] See, for example, J.J. Mathews, 'Feminist history', *Labor History*, no. 50, 1986: J. Allen, 'Evidence and silence: Feminism and the limits of history' in C. Pateman and E. Gross (eds), *Feminist Challenges: Social and political theory*: Sydney, 1986.
[17] Allen, p.173.
[18] Allen, p176.
[19] Allen, pp. 188-9.
[20] Allen, p. 173.
[21] J.W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*; New York, 1988, pp.. 2-3.
[22] Scott, pp. 3-5.
[23] Rose, 'Beyond the public/private', p.72.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"How Adult Literacy became a public issue in Australia"
John Hodgens
Open Letter, Volume 4 (2)

HOW ADULT LITERACY BECAME A PUBLIC ISSUE IN AUSTRALIA

JOHN HODGENS

CONSIDER THESE HEADLINES FROM reports on literacy and illiteracy in Australia:

> Please Help Me: Nearly one of every 25 adult Australians is illiterate (*The Australian Women's Weekly* 5 May 1976, p. 58)
>
> 1m Australians are illiterate (*The Northern Territory News* 22 May 1978, p. 3)
>
> A million Australians lack literacy: survey (*The Age* 6 Sept. 1982, p. 1)
>
> Reading worries 92,000: At least 92,000 Australian born Queenslanders have trouble reading and writing.(*The Courier-Mail* 6 June 1982, p. 3)
>
> Australian illiteracy rate '10%': Up to 10 per cent of adults in Australia are functionally illiterate, a survey by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy has shown. (*The Canberra Times* 10 Sept. 1982, p. 8)

From the mid-1970s to the present, such headlines have been commonplace in Australian print media. In the mid-1960s, literacy barely rated a mention. How, then, did adult illiteracy become an issue of public concern? And why? A simplistic explanation would be that adult illiteracy was a sleeping giant waiting to be awoken, a hidden social phenomenon which until the 1970s escaped the scrutiny of the press and social researchers.

But such an account tends not register the impact of one basic fact. The growth of student numbers in educational institutions,

particularly secondary and tertiary, has been a major trend in Australia since the late 1950s—a trend which systems are attempting to cope with today in the doubling of post-compulsory secondary enrolments since 1976 (Australian Education Council 1991, p. 5). The 1960s and 1970s were a period of unprecedented growth and expansion of secondary and tertiary education in Australia. Sectors of the population previously excluded were now going on to higher levels of secondary education. In 1945 there were approximately 181,000 secondary enrolments in Australia. In 1975 there were 1.1 million (Connell et al. 1982, p. 19). The children of the baby boom—working-class and lower middle-class students, mature-aged students, women and migrants—were hitting the workforce or tertiary education institutions in large numbers. The fact that many who previously had not had the chance now went on to further study, whether secondary or tertiary, does not mean that they achieved success in terms of the ability to handle the 'timeless' curriculum of the disciplines or their inflexible methods of transmission. However, the changed demography of education, the now socially diverse student population, certainly did have an impact on the institutional life of Australia and continues to do so.

This article is an historical review. It considers documentary evidence to show how education systems and interested groups and individuals tended to see this social diversity in terms of deficit and deficiency; and further, how 'literacy' was shaped to fit this vision in public discourse.

I begin here by setting the broad historical context of the 1970s, then turning to newspaper reports of the literacy crisis. I seek to identify the sources of claims of crisis, and the nature of their claims, and conclude with some comments on the way literacy problems have been defined in public discourse and debate. I will also indicate briefly the effect of the public 'crisis' on current curriculum policy and teacher education.

Into the 1970s: Establishing the context of the literacy crisis

A recent commentary makes the following claim:

> Literacy was not a major issue in Australia before preparations for International Literacy Year (ILY) began in 1989. Apart from traditional concern about literacy standards in schools, it excited little interest in public policy debates. Australia even seriously considered whether it was worth participating in ILY. (Simpson 1992, p. iv)

This is curious, in a number of ways. For one thing, it makes too hasty a conclusion. After several searches of newspapers and archival sources (Green, Hodgens & Luke, forthcoming), it becomes clear that apart from the state aid issue, schooling receives little attention during the 1950s and up to the late 1960s. The same applies to literacy in any form. Was it a case of Menzies in office and all's well with the world? Looking at front page headlines of the time, all was certainly not well. Newspapers during the 1950s are consistent in anxious reporting of the cold war. In particular, nuclear testing, Soviet and US space exploits, and 'Formosa', Berlin and other hot spots are front page items on a regular basis. As well, the ongoing Labor Party split and its effects receive sustained attention.

Prior to the 1970s, literacy as such receives little explicit attention. It is clear from our research, however, that the 1970s is a key period in the construction of a literacy crisis in Australia, and that adult literacy is at least as frequent an item as school literacy in newspaper reportage of the time.

Regular reporting on education, with reference particularly to schooling, certainly occurs in the early 1970s. Literacy as such, however, is not the major reported education item by any means during this period. State aid and the subsequent public versus private schools funding debate are dominant. Other reported issues are the brain drain and industrial unrest on the part of teacher unions, symptomatic of the emergence of a new form of teacher power.

Looking back from the mid-1960s onwards, significant changes had been taking place across the whole education sector during the final years of the long period of Liberal-Country Party rule (1949–

1972). As indicated, there had been a steady expansion of numbers of teaching institutions at all levels of education to cope with the 'baby boom'. During this period, Australian education systems started to import ideas and expertise from overseas in many areas. These include expertise on remedial education and 'reading difficulties' and 'literacy' itself. In the late 1960s there is clearly a strong vocal lobby for remedial education. *The Australian Journal of Remedial Education* was founded in May 1969, and Specific Learning Difficulties (SPELD) associations in various states formed a national federation in 1970.

By 1973, the Whitlam Government reforms of schooling started to place emphasis on equality and rectifying disadvantage. Curriculum development and change became a direct concern of the Commonwealth which started making grants to schools on the basis of need. The needs of specific disadvantaged groups were placed on the agenda. At the tertiary level, fees were abolished. Technical and further education and adult literacy within it achieved a new prominence by 1974. After the change to Labor in December 1972, the opening up of Australian education to innovative ideas and perspectives tended to accelerate through many new professional interest groups across a range of areas in education. The Australian Reading Association was formed in 1975.

As a reaction, at least in part, to the new policy directions and innovations in education under Whitlam, the Australian Council for Educational Standards (ACES) was founded in 1973 and fuelled the 'standards debate'. The major ideological change under Labor was the unequal distribution of funds in pursuit of the goal of social equality. From a conservative perspective, 'equality' for socially diverse groups was seen by many as a downgrading of quality or 'excellence'. Calls for curriculum change, to cater for the many, were seen to erode the very notion of educational quality, which depended on the educational success of the few. Conservatives tended to see spending on the basis of equality as, at best, a waste of time and money.

Looking beyond education, the 1960s was a time of unprecedented change. The significance of the Crown was waning. In Vietnam, Australian troops took part for the first time in a war

in which Britain was not involved. Sections of youth, particularly students, became politically vocal. The stability of women's and men's roles came into question, and the 'generation' gap was extended by expressions of youth culture—the Beatles, drugs, blue jeans and long hair. By 1974, the internal political order was being shaken up by the turbulent years of Labor Government. This was an age of anxiety and change. Confidence in many institutions was being shaken. Schools became a prime focus of media anxiety about the direction they were taking and the way kids were 'turning out'. There was a 'crisis', at least in the reporting of events.

After two and a half decades of relative quiet in the press, literacy was suddenly 'in crisis'. My argument is that this crisis is related to the shifting social order and its perceived effect on the formation of the character of young people. It is a crisis in which the moral order of society itself is seen to be at stake. Illiteracy, as reported, is an indicator of a deeper institutional malaise.

What is at issue: Literacy or morality?

The moral aspect of the literacy crisis can be seen very clearly in certain reports which link illiteracy directly with crime:

> When illiteracy can be a crime: As many as one in 10 Tasmanian adults are illiterate . . . . And many have been punished and in some cases jailed . . . . (*The Mercury* 29 July 1982, p. 7)

Emotive images abound: 'affliction', 'disease', 'shame', 'disorder' are common descriptions. Illiteracy is society's 'hidden fear'(*Daily Telegraph* 27 Jan. 1982, p. 10). *The Australian Women's Weekly* (24 Sept. 1977, pp. 16–17) reports:

> Literacy: A Shameful Problem for Every Seventh Australian? Illiteracy is a bigger problem in Australia than most of us probably realise. Some say up to two million people—14 percent of our population—are afflicted . . . .

The language of moral disorder is used. Moral disorder requires a crusade. Numerous headlines at the time called for war:

> How to fight illiteracy (*The National Times* 29 Sept. 1975, p. 18)
>
> TV, Tutors to battle illiteracy (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 3 Dec. 1976, p. 3)

> Reading centre resumes attack on illiteracy (*The Northern Territory News* 14 Oct. 1976, p. 15)
>
> Mothers join in school's special programme fighting illiteracy (*The Australian Women's Weekly* 19 Oct. 1977, p. 83)
>
> Illiteracy war starts on lap (*The Mercury* 27 July 1978, p. 12)

Across the 1970s, then, illiteracy drew metaphorically on a number of highly emotive discourses: those of immorality, warfare, and disease.

An Avalanche of numbers

These connotations of social and moral disorders were furthered by 'scientific evidence', and press reports were accompanied by an 'avalanche of numbers' (Hacking, 1982). From 1974, a notable feature in most press reports is the survey. International surveys, urban samplings and district surveys—and even the home-grown individual school variety—abound. Statistics proliferate in newspaper reports, but on closer inspection these are often 'estimates' by employers and others.

> More than fifteen percent of students who leave high school cannot read well enough to read or write well enough to communicate in the most fundamental way the Victorian Employers Federation said yesterday. (*The Australian* 3 March 1975, p. 3)

Typically, precise details of sources of surveys are not given. The 'education experts' behind most school surveys remain as anonymous figures in the recesses of education departments:

> More than 30,000 NSW high school students have a reading level of nine years and under, education experts said this week. (*The Sunday Telegraph* 17 March 1974, p. 43)

The scale of the incidence of illiteracy varies and the percentage of primary students, secondary students, school leavers, university students, adults, girls and women, or the population at large who are having trouble, swings wildly. The surveys and estimates move from offering raw numbers to detecting trends, namely, 'decline':

> Employers had noticed a steady decline in reading, writing and basic arithmetic standards over the past four years, the organization's secretary, Mr I. C. Spicer said yesterday. (*The Australian* 3 March 1975, p. 3)

Journalists tend to call upon 'commonsense' as opposed to expert knowledge in their commitment to exposing the crisis and waging war on it:

> [S]ome figures cannot be dismissed . . . . No expert can deny there are too many illiterates in a land of such great wealth and small population. (*The Australian Women's Weekly* 29 Sept. 1977, pp. 16–17)

Reports on adult illiteracy and illiteracy in schools are equally as frequent and the two problems are conflated textually. This is a very important factor in the overall 'crisis' because from the start of the 1970s reports often concentrate on adults and their deficiencies, and project the blame onto schools, teachers and the 'sorry state' of education:

> For thousands of people . . . illiteracy is a crippling, shaming disability . . . and one which may have been prevented by better schooling writes Jill Bowen. (*The Australian Women's Weekly* 5 May 1976, p. 58)

As one headline of the time puts it: 'Illiterates turned out by schools' (*The Australian* 3 March 1975, p. 3).

Literacy became a public issue during an era of investigative journalism whose most spectacular success was 'Watergate' in 1974. Allegations of government and bureaucratic 'cover-ups' were frequent in newspaper reporting generally. For instance, as the *Sunday Telegraph* (17 March 1975, p. 43) reported: 'Education Department officials have concealed this in-school illiteracy for at least a decade'.

Who makes the claims?

There are several identifiable sources of vocal and regular reports on literacy:

- The reporting of concerns often comes from journalists doing the investigative study. As such, they are a major players in their own right in the literacy 'crisis'.
- Concerned individual university academics, mainly from literary and scientific 'disciplines', stake out claims as the

guardians of disciplined learning and culture. They find large numbers of students who cannot read or write adequately in their courses.

- Individual teachers are often reported lamenting the appalling state of literacy in schools. Such teachers tend to be enlisted in the push for more remedial programs.
- Teacher unions tend to support the crusade in calling for reduced class size and program provision for specific training.
- Employers notice a steady decline in the literacy 'standards' of young adults entering the workforce. Often employer groups and representatives use the crisis as a pretext to attack the government.
- Librarians as professionals in the area of public reading join the crusade, mainly in a reserved way.
- Politicians join in from time to time, mainly as spokespersons for ethnic groups, or as chairpersons of parliamentary enquiries. The issue of migrant illiteracy remains very much in the background throughout this period.
- Interest groups such as SPELD call for more to be done in the provision of remedial programs.
- Parent organisations such as the Australian Council of State School Organisations call for more remedial programs and specific training.
- Officials of Councils of Adult Education, and education system officials from both schools and TAFE sectors, tend to be quoted on the aims of new programs.
- Literacy professionals, such as academics in the literacy field, put the 'progressive' view. Unfortunately, in reporting successful and innovative programs and in lobbying for funding, literacy educators often fuel public and government alarm and reaction over literacy 'crises'. They also often use the language of 'crusade' in putting their case.

Who or what is the cause of illiteracy?

In all the articles, the causes of illiteracy tend to be multiple. First, many reports in calling for remedial programs imply that the basic cause is in *the make-up of individuals*. According to this view, there is a significant component of the population who have reading problems that are biological and/or psychological in origin. All individuals would either have or lack 'natural' reading ability to a greater or lesser extent. Here the identification of 'lack' is all important. Identifying, separating and remedying the problem groups according to 'levels' is central to this kind of argument.

Second, in many reports the problem is seen to lie *in the home* where children's problems are caused by TV and parental behaviour. There is a continuing concern with the negative effect of mass media on reading. This concern reworks public anxieties established in the 1940s and 1950s. Such reports express worry about the low moral content of popular entertainment and/or the erosion of discipline, particularly in the home. Specifically, TV is seen to distract children from the disciplined learning habits required of reading *and* schooling. TV is also a menace to the discipline required of good parenting. Parents may opt out of their responsibilities and watch TV instead of reading to their children: 'Parents—and television—must share the blame' (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 5 June 1975, p. 6). In essence, this claim is ultimately a question of the moral make-up of individuals through their socialisation in the home and their orientation, or lack of it, to 'discipline' and 'responsibility' (both of which are high frequency terms in reports).

A further and most significant claim targets *poor teaching in schools*. Some reports claim that teachers are indifferent to the needs of young people and lack the necessary commitment to the task at hand. Again, teachers are often accused of irresponsibility and lack of discipline in their teaching, particularly by university academics outside of the literacy and education field. Political activism on the part of teachers (i.e. going on strike) is counterposed with responsibility to children and commitment to their task. And finally, deviation from tried and true ways (i.e.

'progressive' ideas and practices) is likely to have a detrimental effect on the moral character of young people:

> NSW schools are turning out a growing number of irresponsible and often illiterate citizens. But the students are not to blame, according to Professor Harry Messel . . . . 'Changes' had wrecked the system and students were encouraged to do whatever they liked, Prof Messel said. (*Daily Telegraph* 22 May 1978, p. 5)

A fourth target is *teacher education institutions*. This claim states that in the move from 'teacher training' to 'teacher education' that occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s, teacher educators have been 'irresponsible' for putting in place 'trendy' courses that prevent the next generation of teachers from learning how to teach 'the basics'. The 'political' orientation of 'teacher education' is criticised, and counterposed with the 'practical' orientation of 'teacher training'. Reports draw on the imagery of the 'ivory tower' syndrome to attack academics. 'Progressive education' is counterposed very strongly with 'the basics' and with 'traditional education'.

A fifth target is *'the government'* which invariably 'could do more' to alert the public and fight the problem. Again claims of irresponsibility and cover-ups are frequent. Strident calls are made frequently for more remedial teachers. The issue of specific learning difficulties gets a high profile. By 1974 there is a House of Representatives select committee on the matter.

It is important to note that employers do not always or necessarily support the remedial push: 'I feel that if the job was done properly in the first place we wouldn't need remedial work' says the president of the Victorian Employers Federation (*The Australian* 3 March 1975, p. 3). However, employer spokespersons do tend to claim that schools are actually producing a 'flood of unemployables'.

Conclusion

Clearly then, the causes lie in defective brains, defective homes, defective teaching and teacher training, as well as defective government: in short, the deficiency thesis. In our current debates of adult literacy and national policy, the legacy of the 1970s is persistent. Particularly in recent competency-based education and training, there has been an underlying tenor of deficit in the move to

specify and constrain teaching and curriculum. What I think this history shows is that in its very genesis as a field in Australia, adult literacy education has been framed in the public imagination in terms of individual 'lack' and moral failure, as a consequence largely of the perceived 'decline' of the traditional institutions of education and the family.

How did education systems and governments respond to media claims? At the end of the 1970s teacher education programs were been criticised for their lack of focus on practical skills. The Interim Committee of Enquiry into Teacher Education in Victoria, completed on 29 February 1980, is quoted at length in *The Australian* (10 July 1980, p. 9):

> The Report said: 'Looking realistically at all the influences that affect the acquisition of literacy and numeracy, and the competition that the school faces from homes with poor communication, impoverished language, absence of quantitative logic and excessive television watching, it is clear that the beginning primary school teacher should have a basic competence in the teaching of literacy and numeracy . . . .'

As in this extract, the now familiar discourse of the literacy crisis sees deficit everywhere. The answer to deficit is to specify basic competence and to teach to it, not only in relation to the school curriculum but also in teacher education. DEET is quite open about its intentions to see that teacher education has a more 'competency-based' orientation (Beazley, 1993 p. 8). I would hold that this move has its genesis very firmly rooted in the public 'crisis' of the 1970s. Currently the Commonwealth and States, whether collectively or independently, are looking at specifying performance in the curriculum generally and in literacy practice more specifically. The danger is that such specification will turn out to be extremely narrow. My question is: Have these policy initiatives, which now threaten to place such heavy constraints on literacy and curriculum, been shaped substantially by the very success of more than twenty years of the literacy crusade?

Acknowledgment

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Bill Green, John Hodgens and Allan Luke (eds)
Introduction of
Debating Literacy in Australia: A Documentary History 1945 - 1994

INTRODUCTION:
Debating Literacy in Australia, 1945-1994

"Delinquents are rare in Christian homes." *Argus*, 10/5/54, p5.

"Under the pressure of world competition, Australian teachers have been warned, time and again, that they must produce a new generation of scientists quickly if we wish to hold our place in the atomic age". *The Age*, 22/12/59, p.2.

"Illiteracy is the great Australian disease ... We may live in an age of computers but the engineers in charge cannot spell ... There are no jobs left for the illiterate". *The Australian*, 2/8/76, p.3.

"Australia's ability to compete internationally will remain seriously impeded while one in seven workers cannot read and write well enough to improve their skills ... Upgrading literacy skills in Australian workplaces is crucial to improved productivity". John Dawkins, Media Release, Department of Employment, Education and Training, 30/7/1990, p. 1.

"The romance of the written word ... has been the chief casualty of the technological revolution in popular culture, a headlong rush away from the written word and towards mush less demanding, much less fulfilling and ultimately much less civilising forms of communication ..." *The Australian*, 13-14/6/93, p. 18.

1. The challenges of the literacy debate

Rarely does the axiom that those who fail to understand history are bound to repeat it appear more relevant than in the case of public debates over literacy. Teachers' work by definition concentrates on the present. But because teaching and teacher education are defined in terms of finding the 'state of the art', the latest, most scientific approaches - it is all too easy to neglect an understanding of historical contexts and influences, particularly those of the recent and immediate past.

Controversy over literacy has become a permanent fixture of educational debate and policy. With the release of a recent federal parliamentary report entitled "The Literacy Challenge" one front page headline read: "Flaws in Child Literacy" (*The Age*, 2/2/93, p.1). Another newspaper account, more soberly headlines "Report Calls to Boost Literacy Study" (*The Australian*, 6-7/2/93, p.43), argued that primary school children and teacher education alike were seriously and significantly deficient in regard to training and exercise of "literacy skills". Other articles followed: *The Age* published feature articles by Margaret Easterbrook ("Primary Schools Failing Students, Report Finds", 9/2/93) and Michael Barnard ("Literacy Campaign Fails the Written Test", 1/1/93. p.13). *The Weekend Australian* followed this in turn with a feature article by Christopher Bantick, a freelance writer and educational consultant who is currently Senior English Master at Trinity Grammar School, Melbourne. The article was headlined more dramatically, "Burnt by the Fire of New Language", but its subtitle was more familiar

"Disturbing decline in literacy skills in Australian schoolchildren" (February 13-14, 1993, p. 46). Both of these newspapers have become significant players in recent and current literacy and educational debates.

How are teachers and teacher educators to meet the challenges raised by such debates? Typically, these 'outbreaks' continue on with responses by teachers' unions, professional organisations and academics. As you will see in this history, recent strategies have been to cite changing demographic figures and working conditions, and to question the anecdotal, survey or test data upon which such claims are made. Debates then tend to 'die down' after a flurry of reports on other media and public response on radio talk-back and letters-to-the-editor. But the effect is powerful and the damage has been done.

As illustrated in the examples above, much of the literacy debate requires a loss of memory. It depends on the capacity of journalists, politicians and public figures, educators and 'experts' themselves to recycle the same claims, the same images year in and year out. If such claims are repeated and restated sufficiently, they become part of public common sense, part of the 'way things are'. To meet these challenges requires informed and constructive strategies. An important first step for all teachers and teacher educators, journalists and politicians would be to become more familiar with the recent history of public debates over literacy and schooling.

This documentary history provides a useful resource for debate and discussion. Our aim here is to show how literacy education is not really about science or method, a simple contest of truth and falsity, but rather, it is fundamentally a contest of social visions and ideologies.

People have not always talked about literacy as 'literacy'. The use of the terms 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' rarely occurs in the Australian press until recently, from about the early 1970s on. Before this, many educators, politicians and journalists used to use the terms 'reading' and 'writing', or even 'proper English' to refer to what they considered problems in schooling. Our guiding questions for this history, then, are:

- When and why did literacy become a key term in public debates over schooling and culture?
- What is its relationship to more general claims about the English language?
- How did it become connected with a host of other issues, like censorship and morality, standards and standardisation, nationalism and nationality, technology and economic productivity?

This documentary history is about how public debates over literacy and education have been used to forward different versions of appropriate behaviour, and different visions of the ideal literate student and citizen. Our concerns here are the diverse and competing images of the literate and illiterate, and images of the causes and consequences of literacy and illiteracy. We also provide introductions to some of the complex social and cultural, political and economic influences which have shaped these versions of literacy and the literate.

What we offer here is a story, a story of how and why 'literacy' came to matter in Australian cultural and political life.

2. Defining literacy

What is literacy? Across these documents we find it referred to as 'skill', 'competence', "morality", 'tradition', 'heritage', 'knowledge' and so forth. What is interesting is that all of these terms are empty sets for contemporary social and cultural norms and values. The picture that emerges is that of 'literacy' as a continually contested and unfinished concept,

an empty canvas where anxieties and aspirations from the popular imagination and public morality are drawn.

Everybody is an expert on literacy: parents, teachers, politicians, journalists and media 'experts' and, of course, students themselves. In the midst of dynamic social change and cultural diversity, the experiences of schooling and 'becoming literate' are shared social events. That is, literacy education appears to be something everybody has in common. Typically, everybody who has been schooled becomes somewhat of an expert on schooling. In public forums, from talk-back radio shows to school parent meetings, anecdotes about 'how it was when I was in school' become the basis for serious debate and conflict. This should hardly be surprising, since Western educational systems legally require 8-10 years of everyone's daily life experience for classroom work with teachers and texts. Literacy education is an important cultural touchstone: a point of shared cultural practice and experience.

But people have dramatically different memories of becoming literate. Depending on the time and place of their schooling, these range across innumerable versions of the 3R's and the 'basics' to grammar school literary education, from religious training to bilingual education, from phonics teaching to creative writing instruction, from memories of corporal punishment and rote learning to open classrooms. These remembrances of literacy past, filtered through years of life history and experience, are easily turned into claims about how reading and writing *should* be taught, about what teachers and schools *should* do.

This reliance on personal memory and local experience is part of what makes debating and discussing what we should doing with literacy education so difficult. For what at first glance appears to be a cultural touchstone and shared experience, turns out to be a collection of diverse and conflicting experiences. Since the first compulsory State literacy education in the 1400s, one of the persistent beliefs about literacy education has been that it could be the 'great leveller', 'equaliser' and unifier. In fact, there is ample historical evidence that literacy education has served very diverse social, political and economic purposes since that time. In many school systems, the unequal distribution of kinds and levels of literate practice and skill are used to include *and* exclude students from credentials and, ultimately, occupational and life outcomes.

Literacy education, then, always has been about difference and power, about teaching members of communities and nations to 'be' different kinds of literate citizens, with stratified access to social institutions. In this way, who gets what kind of literacy, how, where, to what ends, has always been about 'other' things—about cultural communities and social relations, politics and economics, about wealth and power. So while literacy education might appear at first glance to be a common cultural experience, it is not that at all. Rather, the different kinds of literacies provided for communities oi learners tend to reflect, rather than erase, Australian social difference and cultural diversity.

As you read this documentary history, you will find that the terms 'illiteracy' and 'literacy' have only become common in media and political educational debate in Australia in the last two decades. In fact, there is little mention of the terms 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' in newspapers, magazines, and public debates prior to the early 1970s. By an interesting contrast, it is worth nothing that the terms are common in American, British and Canadian educational debates at least since World War I.

So why and how, then, does literacy become a central focus of the last ten years of educational funding and policy? In the last two decades, Australians have had to contend with large-scale shifts in social, cultural and economic realms. These include at least four closely interrelated elements of change:

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- A shift from relative geographic and communications isolation to participation in globalised culture and multinational economic relations via 'fast capitalist' media, transportations infrastructure, telecommunications, and computer technology;

- An intergenerational shift from traditional British cultural and political orientations to those affiliated with the USA, Asia and other Pacific Rim countries;

- A shift from a resource and agriculture-based economy with protected, traditional markets to a multinational, corporate economy that increasingly is required to compete for global markets and resources, across a range of primary, manufacturing, service and information sectors;

- The emergence of an overtly multicultural, multilingual population as the result of successive waves of postwar immigration, recognition of Aboriginal citizenship and entitlements, and the move away from assimilationist social policy.

Why and how did literacy become an issue? This question requires an analysis of the larger political, cultural and economic issues and forces at play during these periods. No one would doubt that literacy and schooling have parts to play in the making of Australian institutions, politics and everyday life. The period studied here marked the expansion of both private and public Australian educational systems to accommodate the post-war 'baby boom' generation, migrants, and newly-enfranchised Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. The rapid expansion of State schooling, colleges of advanced education, and universities began in the late 1960s. Hence, from the 1970s on, debates over the international competitiveness of schools, colleges and universities; universal access and equity in educational funding; inclusive, economically useful and socially relevant curricula have been placed on the public agenda.

But to argue that levels of 'literacy' or 'illiteracy' are driving forces in changes like those noted above would be a gross overstatement. In fact, there is no recent or contemporary evidence from anv country that levels of literacy either have or are capable of driving such large-scale economic and cultural change.

2. Literacy as a codeword

Unfortunately, this is precisely the assumption at work in the literacy debate: that somehow illiteracy causes social upheaval, cultural and economic decline, and that literacy can solve a range of social problems, from delinquency, to immorality, to crime, to unemployment. In this way, literacy acts as a smokescreen for debate over larger social, cultural and economic issues. One of the central lessons of this history, then, is that it is impossible to study or discuss literacy *per se*. In other words, literacy acts as a 'codeword' for other concerns and anxieties in public debate.

To see this process in action, we turn to a key editorial in *The Australian*, "Losing Our Romance with [the] Printed Word", published on June 13, 1987. It began thus:

> This week we have seen the conclusion of two separate trials for two of the most brutal and disturbing crimes in Australia's history, the rape and murder of Mrs Anita Cobby and the multiple murders which occurred in the Milperra massacre when rival bikie gangs confronted each other in the car park of a suburban hotel.
>
> Australia is not alone in suffering incidents of this kind. The whole world was horrified by the Yorkshire Ripper murders in Britain a few years ago, while America is still pondering the senseless killing of a black youth in New York's Howard Beach district

> There is a thread connecting these disparate acts of carnage beyond merely the gross violence which they involve, and that is the poverty, the emptiness of the culture in which the perpetrators of these crimes live.
>
> At the heart of this poverty of popular culture is the decline of the printed word. Nowadays, when every young school child is exposed to a computer, when school-age children spend almost as many hours in front of the television set as at school, when arithmetic has been almost abolished in favour of calculators and when thousands of children spend countless hours amusing themselves in front of video games generally simulating death and destruction, the romance of the written word has been overwhelmed by the instant gratification offered by the video screen.
>
> The film director Steven Spielberg, the master of the special effects potential of the visual medium, when accepting the Irving Thalberg Memorial Award recently flagged the danger our societies face when they ignore or demean the written word. He called on us to "renew our romance with the word".
>
> The romance of the word: this perhaps above all else has been the chief casualty of the technological revolution in popular culture, a headlong rush away from the written word and towards much less demanding, much less fulfilling and ultimately much less civilizing forms of communication and entertainment.

In a classic expression of the discourse of 'cultural literacy', it went on to set literature against television, reading against viewing, and the new forms of communication against received forms of culture and morality, as well as to make an explicit connection between literature and literacy. Central to its argument and polemic was a conviction of "the civilising effects of words on character":

> [W]ithout the appreciation of the written word, without the ability to lose themselves in a novel, or be thrilled and stimulated by the powerful language of poetry or the lucidity and eloquence of a sustained essay, without the access to a detailed study of history, young people are cut off from their own inheritance and deprived of the civilising effects of words on character.

It concluded in this fashion:

> The eclipse of the written word is the eclipse of sensibility in our society. The more we demean the essential importance of literaure in all its forms the more we impoverish and harden our community, and deprive it of the intellectual and spiritual sustenance it so obviously needs.

This editorial links literacy with a constellation of broader issues and concerns. It begins with references to rape and murder, connecting these with the "poverty of popular culture" and the "decline of the printed word". We are led to believe, then, that violent criminal acts are the result of a decline of literacy. This decline is caused by the advent of "less civilising forms of communication and entertainment" including television, video

games, and computers, by the entry of women into the professional workforce, and by the decline of those institutions that "traditionally taught people a certain code of morality". So the image of the 'illiterate' here is that of the criminal, improperly reared by working women, crazed by exposure to barbaric forms of technological, popular culture.

The overall situation is described as nothing less than the "poverty of . . . contemporary culture" and the "decline" of family, church and school. The answers for immorality, "purposeless", unemployment and "other social ills" lay in a return to "the essential importance of literature". Throughout, the article calls in experts of no less stature than Steven Spielberg, John Howard, and G.K. Chesterton. The image of the 'literate' here is one of the (male?) novel-reading, civilised sensibility, who follows a "certain code of morality" and, no doubt, believes that women should be kept in the home to raise children, and that Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* beats any documentary or mini-series in the provision of "mysterious thrill[s]" any day.

Our point here is that the literacy debate is rarely about 'literacy' in itself. It is tied up with larger political and moral debates about the directions of communities and cultures, nation-states and economies. Here literacy is a codeword for conservative politics, anti-feminist 'backlash', Anglo/British monoculturalism, and so forth. Illiteracy is associated directly with criminality, immorality, mass media, technology, women's right to work. In a wider political field, it implicitly refers to such matters as Repubicanism and nationalism. So in this case, literacy is neither the real issue, problem or answer. What we can ask about such texts is: Whose interests and values are served by this particular version of literacy and illiteracy?

As you can see, by sheer repetition, the literacy debate strings together claims: (1) that standards and practices of literacy are falling; (2) that these declines are definitive cause of wider social, economic and cultural 'ills', and; (3) that schools and teachers are directly or indirectly responsible for these declines.

Above all, then, literacy debates need to be recognized as instances of social and ideological struggle. As Garth Boomer wrote over a decade ago, in a Special Issue of *The Australian Journal of Reading* ("What's Happening to Standards of Literacy?"—Vol 3, No 1, March 1980): "Literacy debates are always diagnosed downwards. Very rarely does a less powerful or less prestigious community group accuse a superior section of the community of being illiterate".

At this point it is worth taking brief account of what is now Australia's official policy on language and literacy, following the Green and White Papers of 1990-1991. In his speech to a Forum organized by the then very new Australian Literacy Federation on March 8, 1991, John Dawkins, Minister for Employment, Education and Training, had this to say: ""We need not apologise for linking literacy and language development to this country's economc future as well as to its social, educational and cultural well-being. The development of long term skills and capacities in individuals assist[s] not only their own personal growth, but also that of the nation's productivity as well". Here, economic considerations are clearly marked out as a primary context for thinking about literacy. As you will see in this history, this is a recurrent theme of the public 'debate' on literacy, schooling and related matters, making up a significant strand as it gathered in momentum from the early 1970s on. What does 'literacy' mean in this regard?

So what is to be done? How are teachers, administrators and parents to respond to such claims? The task of stripping away the various levels of cultural and editorial baggage to talk about standards or levels of literacy is difficult. As this history shows, the statistical data cited from surveys and tests typically is poorly detailed and not documented at all, calling into doubt polemical claims and interpretations reported. Consider these claims from a three year period in the 1970s:

"High school illiteracy ... Two of the three R's are forgotten .. and 30,000 pupils suffer". *Sunday Telegraph*, March 17, 1974, p. 43.

"More than fifteen per cent of students who leave high school cannot read or write well enough to communicate in the most fundamental way". *The Australian*, March 3, 1975, p. 3.

"About 45% of Form 1 and Form 2 students in Melbourne eastern suburbs Government schools are at least two years retarded in reading" *The Age*, April 10, 1075, p.3.

"... in an average Australian community, there are probably more than ten percent of adults who cannot to read, and up to 15 per cent of children who have serious reading difficulties". *Northern Territory News*, October 14, 1976, p. 15.

"More than 225,000 people in NSW cannot read or write as well as a 10-year-old. Eight percent of juvenile offenders in Victorian gaols are incompetent in reading, writing and arithmetic". *Australian Women's Weekly*, September 24, 1977, p. 16.

Often the stringing together of statistical claims is at best speculative, if not deliberately misleading. For instance, if we create a composite of figures from claims in the mid-1970s, near half of the Australian population, adult and child, male and female would be 'illiterate', or, to pick up on some of the dominant metaphors of the time, 'retarded' or, even more to the point, 'diseased'.

But even in the rare instance where data cited might be reliable and accurately reported, the claim of declining standards is both impossible to establish and impossible to refute, for the simple reason that reading and writing are not static and unchanging. They are dynamic social practices, that change in accordance with particular cultural, social and historical contexts. Consider, for example, the straightforward comparison of how well students 'write' or 'read' between 1953 and 1993. A number of factors would have to be considered:

- The student population of Australian schools has changed radically, progressively extending school retention rates such that the typical student in 1953 at, for instance, Grade Five, would hardly be directly comparable to the student of 1993 in cultural, demographic, social, and, quite likely, linguistic background.

- 'Reading' and 'writing' themselves as valued community and workplace practices have changed and developed. For example, the emergence of urban popular culture and the globalisation of Australian culture have meant that different kinds of reading and writing are valued in everyday life. The changing economy has meant that some kinds of jobs have disappeared, and others, aligned with service industries, have emerged. So some demands for literacy and everyday sites where it was used in particular, occupational ways have emerged and others have disappeared.

- School instruction and curriculum have developed to reflect and foreshadow such changes. While the 1950s curriculum might have emphasised literary study, handwriting and spelling, for instance—current curriculum has widened its net to cover such areas as computer and basic keyboard skills, writing and reading a range of functional, occupational and academic text types, and media study. The demands on curriculum from community, employers and political groups continue to widen and expand.

So simple claims that standards and practices of literacy have 'declined' at best risk being unfair and/or illogical. To compare students' reading and writing of the 1950s and 1980s

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is akin to comparing apples and oranges. As recent debates over declining reading achievement test scores has shown once again, even apparently straightforward comparisons of school achievement on standardised tests over shorter periods of time need to consider a range of historical, contextual and population variables. This is to say nothing of questions about the accuracy and efficacy of test instruments, examination results and other measures.

Articles like "Losing Our Romance with Printed Word" and the everyday claims that teachers encounter have to be approached critically and analytically. Educators and literacy professionals dismiss them lightly at our own professional risk. Our task in this history is to try to identify and disentangle all of the associated cultural and political interests at work in such claims. By providing an historical overview of how the present 'came to be', we would hope that this documentary history will offer tools and concepts for taking up this challenge.

At the same time, the professional responsibility of educators is to continually reappraise our own teaching practices and curriculum materials. That is, to say that literacy is a social and historical construction, to say that it is impossible to document a decline in absolute terms—these should not lead to the hasty conclusion that 'all is well' in literacy education. Quite the contrary. Schools, teachers and teaching remain the focus of these same historical forces and institutional interests at work in this history. To respond critically and constructively to curriculum change, to renewed pressures on teaching and learning conditions, to make decisions about how and in what directions to shape literacy, requires that we understand its history. It requires that we understand how literacy is related to social and cultural issues, and political and economic forces. Only then can we begin to make informed decisions about what should count as literacy, for whom, and in what kind of literate culture and society.

Darryl Dymock
"'Fallout the Illiterates' - Lessons from a World War II Adult Literacy Program"
***Open Letter* Volume 3.2**

'FALL OUT THE ILLITERATES'—LESSONS FROM A WORLD WAR II ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM

DARRYL R. DYMOCK

THE OFFICIAL HISTORIAN FOR World War II, Gavin Long (1963, p.85), claimed that a 'big achievement' of the Australian Army Education Service (AAES) was in reducing the 'grave degree' of illiteracy that existed in Australia. The extent to which the AAES had an impact on illiteracy in Australia is debatable, but the Service did help to draw the size of the problem to the attention of army and public authorities in the early 1940s and evolved innovative practices to help those affected. Current policy makers and practitioners will identify with many of the circumstances confronted by Army Education staff and will also recognise some of the deeper issues involved.

Adult illiteracy 'discovered'

The AIF Education Service provided literacy classes for Australian soldiers in World War I, but that experience was apparently forgotten when its successor, the Australian Army Education Service, was established in 1941. The purpose of the AAES during World War II was to provide a range of educational activities for Australian troops

stationed across the country and in Papua and New Guinea, in order to help alleviate boredom and to prepare them for their eventual return to civilian life (Dymock 1990). The reason that provision for illiteracy was not included in the second scheme was no doubt because, by that time, school attendance in all States was compulsory up to the age of 14 years, and a 1938 report (Cunningham et al.) confidently stated that 'illiteracy in Australia is practically non-existent'. A former senior Army Education Officer recalled in an interview (Wilson 1986) that it therefore came as something of a shock for educators to discover five years later that a significant proportion of adults had difficulties with 'the three Rs'.

J. G. McKenzie, Director-General of Education in New South Wales, raised the issue at a meeting of the Australian Services Education Council (Minutes p. 9), an advisory body to the AAES, in August 1942, when the Education Service had been operating for just over twelve months. McKenzie reported that his Department had tried to assist soldiers who had reading and writing problems, but said there had been difficulties, particularly because of the re-posting of troops. One of his teachers had also been told, he claimed, that illiterate soldiers 'could perform ordinary army drill, so there was no need to teach them to read and write'. It is to be hoped that educators currently trying to introduce workplace basic education programs encounter more enlightened attitudes amongst employers!

About the same time, Army Education staff came face-to-face with the problem in the field: reports from Education Officers in many areas had mentioned the incidence of illiteracy, and company commanders and other officers were asking Education staff if they could assist (Coates 1948, p. 168). Such soldiers were said to be causing problems with military training, discipline and general morale, and their superior officers apparently believed that remedying illiteracy would overcome the other problems. A later report (McKinty n.d., p. 1) into illiteracy among army recruits supported this view, noting that, apart from the personal aspect of illiteracy, army efficiency and discipline improved because a soldier's interest in training increased when he could read

charts and blackboard summaries and because he became more contented if he could correspond, 'however poorly', with his family.

The Services Education Council (Minutes 1942) called on the Army to take measures to deal with what it saw as a 'serious educational problem', which could affect efficiency as well as plans for post-war reconstruction (an indication that an emphasis on literacy for vocational purposes is not just a recent phenomenon). Subsequently, the Director of Army Education, R.B. Madgwick (1943) reported to an ASEC meeting in May 1943 that, on the basis of AAES survey findings, over 3 per cent of all Australian troops could be assumed to be 'illiterate', a total of around 15,000 soldiers.

One of the reasons that illiteracy particularly came to notice in the army was that soldiers could not depend on the help of a literate relative as they probably had in civil life. Some of those found were identified through the censoring of mail or their inability to read maps and orders. One report (Maclaine 1948, p. 1) noted that illiterates had little prospect of promotion and went in fear of being punished for offences they thought they might have inadvertently committed because they could not read Routine Orders and other printed instructions. However, the difficulty of encouraging adults apparently in need of assistance to admit that need was as great then as it has been in recent times: 'In the Army a man gradually parts with most of his personal secrets, but this appeared to be the last secret a man wished to yield up' (Coates 1948, p. 171).

The Initial Response of Army Education

Initially, the Army Education response was slow and sporadic—there were few staff, and none of them was experienced in dealing with illiteracy among adults. According to one report (July 1943), the lack of teachers with relevant expertise was compounded by a dearth of suitable material for students, competing demands on soldiers' time, and the continual movements of troops from one posting to another. Nevertheless, as unit commanding officers gave increasing encouragement and assistance to Education staff to establish classes in

basic reading and writing for soldiers, the AAES accepted this new 'remedial' role.

A significant AAES initiative was the publication in December 1943 of a reader for use in literacy classes, *Opportunity Book No. 1*. In keeping with an approach that has more recently become common practice, the book drew heavily on familiar aspects of army life and was used in the field with considerable success (Madgwick 1944). Despite the various attempts to help soldiers in the field, however, some Army Education members believed (Maclaine 1948, p. 5) that a more effective approach might be to try to identify the problem and cope with it before soldiers were posted to operational units, that is, at the recruit training depots.

At this stage, well before such controversial developments as the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Competency Scales (Griffin & Forwood 1991), there were no literacy tests for soldiers on entry to the Army. Subsequently the 'Army Psychology Service Literacy Test' was introduced, not to diagnose specific reading and writing disabilities, but to enable a preliminary estimate to be made of the ability to read and write (Yandell 1946, p. 5). Validation of the test established three categories of illiteracy, 'illiterate'—corresponding to the reading and writing ability of an Australian child below six years ten months in age; 'near-illiterate'—having a reading age from six years ten months to eight years six months; and 'educationally backward'—having a reading age from eight years six months to ten years two months (Coates 1948, p. 172). Those whose test results indicated a reading age of more than ten years two months were regarded as 'satisfactory'.

The extent of adult illiteracy in the 1940s

In mid-1943, the Army decided to train all recruits, except those from Western Australia, at one recruit training centre at Cowra, New South Wales. Early in 1944, the Army Psychology Service administered the newly developed literacy test to all available recruits at the Cowra camp. The table on the following page displays the results (Mitchell 1944).

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Literacy levels of Australian Army Recruits, Cowra, early 1944

Rating	No. in group	Percentage (approx)
Satisfactory	925	88.6
Educationally backward	84	8.0
Near Illiterate	30	2.8
Illiterate	6	.6

(N = 1045)

The 120 soldiers who were not in the 'satisfactory' category were then further tested using an ACER test in an attempt to discover the degree to which each recruit was capable of learning to read and write. Ninety of the group were found to be of 'very poor' intelligence with the remaining thirty rating from 'average' to 'very good'. From these results, the camp's commanding officer concluded that only these thirty soldiers, or twenty-five per cent, were of sufficient intelligence to be able to benefit from literacy tuition, and the issue was therefore 'essentially a minority problem' (Mitchell 1944, p. 1).

In April 1944, a study of over 1500 recruits provided similar figures (Coates 1948, p. 173). These two studies established that just over three per cent of the army's personnel were illiterate or near-illiterate, and a further 8 to 11 per cent had a reading age below that of an average ten-year-old child. Could these figures also be applied to the civilian population at that time? A senior Army Education Officer observed:

> In applying this study to the civilian population, it must be remembered (a) that many superior men educationally were exempt from military service on manpower grounds, or had joined the Navy or Air Force, and (b) that the men tested were actually enlisted, and an unknown number of men offered to the Army by the Directorate of Manpower would already have been cut off at the Reception Depots and rejected because of mental deficiency. These considerations would work in opposite directions, as many of the rejects in (b) would

> be illiterate or almost so. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the figures for the civilian population would be of the order given by the above samples. (Coates 1948, p. 124)

Thirty years later, Goyen's study (1977) of illiteracy in Sydney produced very similar figures for adults born in English-speaking countries and Wickert's (1989) more sophisticated approach established that there continue to be many adults in this country who cannot cope with certain literacy and numeracy tasks in certain situations. However, the wartime figures belie the argument that there was a 'golden age' in Australia when all adults could read, write and calculate without apparent difficulty.

The Preparatory Military Training Program

Following a recommendation from the camp's commanding officer, the Preparatory Military Training Course (PMTC) began at Cowra in August 1944 (Marquet n.d., p. 2) to meet the 'minority problem', with a similar program in Western Australia. Each course ran for three weeks, with ten incoming recruits (all the Army would release) selected at a time. If necessary, a student could also be retained a further week. It was through their involvement with the PMTC that Army Education staff discovered much about the need for innovative methods and materials in adult literacy provision.

In preparing the course syllabus, staff were guided by the AAES *Instructor's Manual for Opportunity Classes*, which had been developed to accompany *Opportunity Book 1*. The aims of the course (quoted by Yandell 1946, p. 40), designed to meet the immediate demands of training, also reveal an understanding of some of the principles of adult education which have been proposed in more recent times. They echo, for example, one of the assumptions of andragogy, that adults 'learn new knowledge, skills, values and attitudes most effectively when they are presented in the context of application to real-life situations' (Knowles, 1990, p. 61).

1. To develop the ability to read Army signs, directions, orders, notices, bulletins, and training manuals.
2. To develop sufficient skill in oral reading to be able to pass on essential military information.
3. To develop the ability to recognize some of the commonest abbreviations used in the Army, and to fill in essential Army forms.
4. To enlarge the soldier's interests and life-experience by developing requisite skills to read newspapers, books and magazines, and to read and write private letters.
5. To develop the ability to write legibly at a fair speed.
6. To give some incidental practice in oral language through discussion of the lesson material and of matters of common interest to the soldier.
7. To lay a foundation for further study by mastering the necessary skills of reading, writing and expression of ideas.

As in current adult basic education programs, staff had to contend with a range of attitudes. One officer (Marquet n.d., p. 7) suggested that students could be placed on a continuum. At one extreme would be the soldier who had not been able to compensate for his 'disability' and was therefore sensitive and diffident, and at the other the soldier who had responded with aggressive belittling of the accomplishments he lacked and with an apparent disinclination to learn. Since the course was compulsory for those selected for it, there was often an initial antagonism and apathy to overcome, an attitude familiar to current teachers in courses preparing 'reluctant learners' for such purposes as employment or promotion.

Attendance at the PMTC drew the unwelcome attention of fellow recruits and the draft of a talk on illiteracy given by an Education Officer (Kirby n.d., p. 5) at the School of Army Education included a reference to a real or imagined parade command: 'Fall out the illiterates!' Many of the recruits in the PMTC initially resented being

sent 'back to school' while their friends completed their military training ahead of them. To help the transition, Education staff tried to avoid developing a 'school atmosphere' by making the classrooms as attractive as possible, providing plenty of reading material and wall displays, and allowing the men to smoke in class.

Because most AAES members had not been involved in adult education before the war, they also discovered much about adult learning from those soldiers labelled 'illiterate', 'near-illiterate' and 'educationally backward':

> It was...more surprising for a teacher who from experience with small children has been trained to expect a slow realization and an even slower accurate application of a new arithmetical principle to find that adults of below average intelligence were able to grasp the mathematical work quickly by virtue of the fact that they brought to their task a mature outlook, a desire to learn and a great deal of experience. The success of the instructor in no small measure depended upon his ability to link his teaching with everyday experience common to most adults. (Maclaine 1948, p. 36)

Similar to the situation in Australian adult literacy programs in the 1970s (Dymock 1982), the lack of suitable textbooks was a problem that stretched the ingenuity of the instructors. Although *Opportunity Book No.1* was available in late 1943, there was little appropriate supplementary reading material available and the publication of the next book in the series was delayed until 1945. Initially some lessons were based on arithmetic books and the School Magazine used by the NSW Education Department, but their limitations with adults were soon realized. Army Education staff were forced to develop their own arithmetic examples, relating them particularly to army training, while small 'Box Circulating Libraries', *Salt* magazine (the AAES journal) and daily newspapers also provided the basis for reading and writing activities. In December 1944, the syllabus was broadened to include social studies, military training (e.g. identifying emblems) and games.

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The outcomes

Given that the instructors in the PMTC used innovative methods and materials, what results did they achieve? The answer seems to be much, and little, depending on the criteria used. As later educators were to discover, quantitative tests were inadequate in trying to provide a 'single measure' that would separate the literate from the illiterate—there were individual instances where early tests indicated a decrease in literacy had occurred over the period of the course. The officer-in-charge of the Psychology Testing Section at Cowra (Barratt) reported in January 1945 that scores from a sample of 106 recruits who had completed the PMTC showed a significant rise over the scores at the beginning of the course. However, he warned that the tests were not designed to either help select students for further educational courses or to grade fine improvements in literacy, and said that the results had to be taken only as indicating general trends. One Army Education officer (Marquet n.d., p. 6) suggested that it would appear to take 'approximately double the time to make an Educationally Backward man Satisfactory than it takes to make a Near Illiterate man Educationally Backward'. Whether someone declared to have reached the level of 'educationally backward' would regard that as an achievement is another matter!

What seems to emerge is that there was generally an improvement in the literacy and numeracy skills of students completing the PMTC. However, Education Officers at Cowra had doubts about how long-lasting these results were. Reservations expressed more recently about the effectiveness of short basic education courses (e.g. Wickert and Zimmerman, 1991) are echoes of complaints by Army Education staff in 1945: it was suggested (Marquet n.d., p. 7) that the soldier students would not be able to cope with advanced training unless the PMTC was longer than three weeks, and that even the best students needed at least a month. Some of the 'graduates' of the course were posted for further training but had great difficulty with such activities as map reading and navigation, and one Education Officer (Maclaine, 1948, p. 53) suggested that most of the recruits who completed the PMTC

retained some of their improved skills in reading and writing but that they gradually regressed to their previous general educational level. In any event, in August 1945, the month World War II ended, Army authorities decided that 'the provision of a preparatory educational course for illiterate, near-illiterate and educationally backward recruits is not an Army responsibility' (quoted in McKinty, n.d., p. 8) and the Cowra program ended. No substantial provision for adult literacy teaching was then made in Australia for more than twenty-five years (Dymock 1982).

Despite the uncertainty about the reliability of results of the Cowra program and whether any gains would be sustained, there appear to have been some outcomes that were not easily measured. For example, most men reported (Marquet n.d., p. 6) that they had benefited from the course even though some had been antagonistic towards it at the start. There were also reports (Maclaine 1948, p. 49; McKinty n.d., p. 6) of a noticeable change of attitude towards the army itself and one Education Officer (Maclaine 1948, p. 6) suggested that the men became smarter in personal appearance and physical actions and more mentally alert. Some of this apparent improvement no doubt was the result of attempts by the instructors to treat the recruits as adults and to help them recognize their self-worth. The lesson was, as numerous later writers observed (e.g. White 1985; Grant 1987) that the development of self-esteem goes hand-in-hand with the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills.

Meeting literacy needs of other groups

The AAES also gave assistance to those who more recently have been referred to as adults with a 'Non-English Speaking Background'. Some of this work was carried out amongst immigrants or 'friendly aliens', enlisted in employment (i.e. labour) companies and included experimental work with Chinese-staffed employment companies in Western Australia and with Greek- and Italian-born members of such companies in Queensland (Memo 1944). By early 1944, the AAES in Western Australia had developed two publications for literacy classes,

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'English lessons for foreign-born personnel' and 'Army Education Service Reader' (Memo 1944).

Again there were lessons for the educators to learn. One report (Marquet n.d., p. 9) of a Queensland program said that the diversity of European temperaments and nationalities represented in classes meant that the individuality of the students was taken into account even more than for Australian-born literacy students. Many of the members of employment companies, especially those literate in their own language, reacted strongly to being treated like children, and literacy classes held in an employment company in Sydney had to allow for the fact that many of the students were university graduates in their countries of origin (Marquet n.d., p. 8).

Readers will have noticed that the references so far have been only to men in literacy programs. This is because there is no mention of women in reports of specific literacy programs which were consulted for this article nor in the history of education in the Australian Women's Army Service (1941–51). A senior Army Education Officer suggested at the time that there was little need for basic education for women in the Services 'presumably because of the higher educational standard required for enlistment' (Coates 1948, 202).

With the end of the war, literacy classes were made available to Australian troops awaiting transport home from New Guinea and other parts of the south-west Pacific. These students usually made rapid progress because they were strongly motivated: 'Troops were becoming conscious of the fact that they would come back to a different world and would need to be better educated' (Haynes 1988).

Review

It is difficult to determine from the various reports and studies to what degree the AAES helped soldiers who had literacy problems in World War II. One researcher (Yandell 1946, p. 43) reported that the service conducted its classes and recorded the results 'so haphazardly' that it was impossible to know how many soldiers attended literacy classes and, of those who did, how many achieved 'functional literacy', a

situation not unknown in more recent times among literacy program coordinators particularly in the 1970s (Dymock 1982). And current practitioners will no doubt cringe at such practices as using the term 'illiterate'; equating adult literacy levels with children's reading-ages; and the use of labels such as 'educationally backward' to typecast the soldier students.

Nevertheless, what the Australian Army Education Service achieved with its adult literacy programs was quite significant in educational terms; because it was a new area of teaching and learning, the instructors were forced to experiment. Their initial reliance on school practices and materials was soon found to be ineffective with adults, particularly since most of the students were compelled to attend. The result was innovative teaching and materials, designed to meet the literacy and numeracy needs of adults in particular situations. There were similar developments in other allied armies, but these apparently proceeded independently (Yandell 1946, p. 43), so the efforts of the Army Education staff were pioneering in Australia. It is unfortunate that their experiences were lost with demobilisation and the virtual dismantling of the Education Service at the end of the war—the lessons learned about adult literacy teaching and materials development would have been a useful starting point for Australian adult educators thirty years later, when the first wave of recent adult literacy provision began to spread across Australia.

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'An issue of significant community concern': the postwar development of adult literacy policy and provision in Australia

Darryl R Dymock

The Commonwealth Government's White Paper, *Australia's language: the Australian language and literacy policy*, (DEET, 1991, vol.2, 8) suggested that 'adult literacy has only recently emerged as an issue of significant community concern in Australia'. Yet evidence of significant literacy difficulties among Australian adults first emerged around 50 years ago, and educators have been attempting to draw attention to it to a lesser or greater degree ever since. This paper charts the postwar development of adult literacy policy and provision and examines the recent emergence of a national language and literacy policy. The intention is to provide a brief history and analysis which might provide some background for the other papers in this volume and in the volumes that follow.

World War II and after

A national report on Australian education in 1938 confidently asserted that, since schooling up to the age of 14 years was compulsory, 'illiteracy in Australia is practically non-existent' (Cunningham et al, 1939, 19). Five years later, surveys by members of the wartime Australian Army Education Service found that just over three per cent of Australian troops were 'illiterate or near illiterate' and a further eight to eleven per cent had a reading age 'below that of an average ten-year-old child' (Coates, 1948, 175). The army responded by establishing a short course at the main recruit training centre, and Army Education staff organised classes at other depots in Australia for those already in the army. This was the first attempt at widespread 'provision'.

However, with the end of the war in 1945 and subsequent demobilisation of most of the troops, Army Education's effort dissipated, and the official concern for adult literacy education was lost. This was despite the findings of a 1944 report on Australian adult education by Duncan (1944, 105), supported by a senior army education officer (Coates, 1948, 224), that the Army figures were valid for the Australian civilian population. The issue was not yet 'of significant community concern'.

Twenty years later, the official line was similar to that of 1938: the Federal Government advised Unesco that, since schooling was compulsory, there was no illiteracy in Australia (IBE and Unesco, 1964, xvi). This was despite the fact that, in the same year, the *Handbook of Australian Adult Education* (Warburton, 1964, 37) reported that evening colleges in New South Wales organised classes for adult illiterates 'from time to time as the occasion demands'. The student counselling service at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges in New South Wales also provided remedial classes in reading and mathematics for college students from the 1950s (TAFE, 1977), and literacy teaching was a major part of prisoner education in some States in this period (Pearse, 1976, 79).

The seventies

The 1970s saw the first wave of the widespread development of adult literacy policy and provision in Australia. The decade was marked by a trickle of activities by State and Territory authorities, the first Australian survey of adult literacy levels, two influential national reports, the awakening of Federal Government interest, increasing involvement by the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector, and the emergence of advocacy bodies.

The reasons for the upsurge in activity in this period amongst adult educators can be summarised by the experience of the Council of Adult Education (CAE) in Victoria in 1973 (CAE, 1974, iv) which:

> ...stumbled, as it were, on the problem. It had set out, in the first instance, to discover at first hand by direct contact what the educational needs of the disadvantaged suburbs were, those needs which were not being met by traditional programs. The direct contact with social workers, community groups, and educational authorities in the Western suburbs uncovered the problem of illiteracy overnight.

Similar discoveries north of the border had led to the establishment of adult literacy classes in New South Wales evening colleges in 1972, in conjunction with the Adult Migrant Education Service (Falkenmire, 1976, 35). Along with Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland introduced small literacy programs in 1973, and the other States and Territories followed soon after (Dymock, 1982). By 1976, while most programs were offered through State Government departments and agencies, there was also some involvement by a few independent organisations (Pearse, 1976, 79).

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Around this time, a survey by Goyen (1977) in Sydney indicated that almost 4 per cent of Australians born in English-speaking countries were functionally illiterate according to a Unesco definition. This finding was similar to that of the Army Education service 30 years earlier. Goyen also estimated that more than 40 per cent of migrants born in non-English-speaking countries were illiterate in English.

Despite the national implications of Goyen's study and the increasing amount of educational activity, the issue of adult literacy moved very slowly on to the Federal political agenda. Three reports helped bring it to the closer attention of the Federal Government and the TAFE sector. The first of these was the Kangan Report (*TAFE in Australia: report on needs in Technical and Further Education*, 1974) which briefly noted lack of literacy as both an access problem to further TAFE education (p.xxv) and as a 'learning disability', under the sub-heading 'Handicapped persons' (p.16), and recommended further research.

The following year, the Richardson Report (*TAFE in Australia : second report on needs in Technical and Further Education*, 1975) was more expansive, direct and subsequently influential. It included illiteracy in the category of 'specific learning disabilities', but observed that 'the major TAFE sector has a poor record in the area of adult literacy', and suggested that this area should be a major challenge for TAFE , and urged State TAFE authorities 'to regard literacy programs as a high priority in their use of Australian Government funds' (p.96). The interplay between the Commonwealth and the States has been a feature of postwar education policy and it was not until the Richardson Report that much consideration was given to the administration of Commonwealth funds granted to the States for *adult* education purposes - such provision had never been a significant responsibility of the States (Pearse, 1976, 78).

About that same time, a House of Representatives Select Committee report, *Learning difficulties in children and adults* (Cadman, 1976, 81-86) recommended that there should be more opportunities and facilities for adults wishing to overcome literacy problems and that the TAFE authority in each State should co-ordinate programs. There was support too from the Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty (Fitzgerald, 1976, 151), which suggested that the Commonwealth should provide funding for existing adult literacy education programs and participate in evaluation of their work.

The State and Federal Governments responded to the pressure exerted through these reports and increasing community concern - by 1980, there was significant TAFE or equivalent adult literacy provision in

every State and the ACT (Dymock, 1982). Earmarked Commonwealth funds, directed through the Technical and Further Education Commission, were generally used by the States to finance innovative projects, while State Government funds were used 'to maintain the schemes, to pay the salaries of full-time professional staff, and to extend and improve the quality of service offered' (White, 1980, 4).

In addition to these official responses, the late seventies also saw the emergence of adult literacy advocacy bodies at both State and national level. New South Wales and Victoria were the first to have State councils, established outside the official providers but composed of those involved in the field. Nationally, a report by a working party of the Australian Association of Adult Education (AAAE, 1976) led to the establishment of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL), which held the first of a series of annual conferences in 1977. At that conference, it was decided that ACAL's functions would be: publication of a newsletter, organisation of conferences, information gathering and exchange, co-ordination and development of materials and resources, liaison with other education organisations, and inviting community attention to adult literacy problems (ACAL, 1977, 123). The last was a reminder that, despite increasing educational activity and 'a positive social climate' (Pearse, 1976, 89), adult literacy was only just beginning to emerge as 'an issue of significant community concern'.

In 1978, the Federal Government responded to an ACAL initiative by establishing the Commonwealth Interdepartmental Working Party on Adult Literacy and Numeracy. In responding to the Commonwealth Minister for Education's initial proposal, Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser said (Commonwealth Department of Education, 1979, 7):

> I have no objection to your proposal to establish a short term interdepartmental working party convened by your Department to consider the need for co-ordination in Commonwealth programs with relevance to adult literacy and numeracy. The working party could also, as you suggest, provide you with advice for a public statement regarding the Commonwealth role in regard to literacy and numeracy.

The suggestion of 'a public statement' was an indication that the Commonwealth Government was moving towards developing a policy on the extent of its responsibility for adult literacy and numeracy programs. However, the Prime Minister made it clear that there would be no significant developments:

> In this regard I would see it as important in the present climate of budgetary restraint for the working party to address itself primarily to the co-ordination of existing programs and ways in which such programs can, within presently available resources, be made more responsive to the needs of adult illiterates.

A national survey in 1980 (Dymock, 1982) revealed that the number of adult literacy schemes in Australia had grown from two to more than 180 in a decade, that almost half were the responsibility of departments or divisions of TAFE, with about one-third community based, and that an overwhelming number of adult literacy teachers were volunteer tutors, with only about four per cent full-time professionals. The diversity of provision was seen as both an advantage for students in terms of access and types of tuition, and a disadvantage for the providers in terms of co-ordination and co-operation. Attempts to provide more support at State level for tutors and teachers included establishment of the Adult Literacy Information Office in New South Wales and the Access Resource Centre at the Council of Adult Education in Victoria.

The eighties

The early 1980s were characterised by an increasing number of adult literacy programs and of full-time professional staff across Australia, and more national reports; the second half of the decade saw the most significant post-war developments in adult literacy in terms of federal government policy and increased research.

In 1983, the NSW Board of Adult Education urged the Commonwealth Government to strengthen its role in adult literacy through the provision of extra funds, and called for an assessment of the effectiveness of adult literacy programs. That same year, with a national adult literacy campaign as part of Australian Labor Party policy, the Hawke Government took office. At the request of the Federal Government, the TAFE Council of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) in 1984 made a number of recommendations in relation to a joint Commonwealth-State campaign to combat illiteracy, including additional funding of $7.5 million over the following three years (CTEC,1984, 101-2).

A Federal Senate Standing Committee also produced a report, *A National Language Policy*, (Colston, 1984, 65-73) which urged the Government to accept the TAFE Council proposals and recommended a 'national committee on adult literacy'. A report on adult literacy needs and provisions assessment, commissioned by the then Commonwealth Department of Education and Youth Affairs (Grant,

1987, 35), also supported the TAFE Council recommendations. However, the $2 million recommended for adult literacy provision in 1985 became $2 million among 'disadvantaged groups' and the adult literacy share dwindled to $0.5 million (Grant 1987, x). White (1985, 32) observed that 'even fifteen years down the track, the extent of adult illiteracy in Australia is still largely unrecognised' - it was not yet 'a significant community concern'.

It was 1987 before the Commonwealth Government announced a firm policy on adult literacy by endorsing the National Policy on Languages (Lo Bianco, 1987), with funding of around $4 million over two financial years for what became the Adult Literacy Action Campaign (ALAC). The Commonwealth Government had finally come to support adult literacy directly in a significant way. Lo Bianco (1987, 18) claimed that 'the idea of a *campaign* appealed because it contains the suggestion of inbuilt obsolescence but also because it tends to invest the problem with a high *solveability quotient* - a much admired quality in policy'. If this is true, it indicates a limited understanding at that time by the Federal Government of the nature of adult literacies.

A report on the Adult Literacy Action Campaign (Ernst & Young, 1990, 77) concluded that ALAC funds were successfully used in each State and Territory to improve the social and economic participation of individuals in society. One of the significant features of ALAC was that it generated much-needed research - twelve national activities and numerous State research projects that, in the words of Lo Bianco (1990, 20), 'have greatly expanded the knowledge base which planners have at their disposal and for practitioners they provide a rich source of documented experience'. Some of the latter was collected in a series on 'Good practice in Australian adult literacy and basic education', which has become an ongoing publication. The most notable ALAC research project was a survey of Australian adult literacy, published as *No single measure* (Wickert, 1989), which not only provided the first reliable statistics since Goyen's 1974 study, but also drew considerable media attention, helping to make literacy a more public issue, and therefore potentially a more political one.

Despite the success of ALAC, Simpson (1990, 11), writing in 1989, suggested that '... gains made by ALAC are severely at risk. Victoria has now joined New South Wales in having a reasonable, recurrent base for adult literacy provision but development in the other states and territories is still embryonic'. This view was borne out by a review of Commonwealth/State adult literacy expenditure in 1989 (Coopers and Lybrand, 1990, 3) which noted uneven expenditure levels within States and Territories and among the Commonwealth's various programs, as

well as 'considerable variation as between States and Territories as to conceptions of the extent of responsibility for adult literacy provision'.

Into the nineties

In view of those concerns, International Literacy Year (ILY), 1990, arrived in Australia at a propitious time, because it was able to maintain the focus which had been generated by the Adult Literacy Action Campaign. Against some opposition and apathy (Simpson, 1992, iv-v), the Commonwealth Government committed $3 million of new policy funding and over $2 million from existing sources for ILY purposes in 1989/90. A further $750,000 was made available into 1991. The National Consultative Council (NCC) for ILY decided on four priority areas: adult literacy (40% of funding), child and community literacy, international activities, and public awareness (20% each) (DEET, 1992, 39). Because of the limited period of funding, the NCC chose to fund projects which potentially had long-term benefits, rather than support expanded literacy provision, which had no guarantee of ongoing funding.

Over the period 1989-91, ILY funding supported 51 national adult literacy projects, ranging from establishment of competency rating scales for adult literacy and numeracy to investigating the pedagogical relationship between adult ESL and literacy (DEET, 1992, 99-103). 67 smaller projects included research into the literacy needs of the Aboriginal community in Gnowangerup, Western Australia, and an action plan to enhance the literacy skills of the Australian deaf community. In addition there was a number of public awareness activities and international projects, as well as those concerned primarily with children's and community literacy. There were also literacy activities in 1990 generated by State ILY committees, community organisations such as the Bible Society and the Riverina Regional Council of Adult Education, and Commonwealth Government departments other than Employment, Education and Training.

There were immediate and ongoing outcomes (DEET, 1992): ILY generated considerable public awareness of the incidence of literacy and numeracy inadequacy in the community and of its social and economic impact; within the adult literacy community it generated substantially increased research, professional development opportunities and occasional heat over some of the research outcomes e.g. the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Scales proposed for the assessment of student competencies (ACAL, 1992). The breadth of ILY activities also meant that adult literacy began to move into the literacy mainstream, as links

were made with literacy developments in the school and in the workplace.

The momentum established by ALAC and continued by ILY activities, coupled with a review in 1990 of Commonwealth language and literacy programs (DEET,1992, 97), led the Federal Government to issue a Discussion (Green) Paper, in late 1990. Following receipt of public comment, and endorsement by the States and Territories (through the Australian Education Council) of a draft national literacy strategy (DEET,1992, 97), the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins, in August 1991 released a Policy (White) Paper entitled *Australia's language: the Australian language and literacy policy* (DEET, 1991). At last adult literacy had become an issue of community concern significant enough for it to be the subject of a major Federal education policy.

The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP) built on the 1987 National Policy on Languages. It has four goals, three of them relating to languages other than English, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, and language services provided by interpreters and translators, respectively. The fourth goal is about English language and literacy (DEET, 1991, 4):

> All Australian residents should maintain and develop a level of spoken and written English which is appropriate for a range of contexts, with the support of education and training programs addressing their diverse learning needs.

In respect of adult literacy, the Government committed a total of more than $130 million between 1991 and 1995 for provision by the TAFE and community education sectors, and for curriculum and teacher development and similar purposes. It pledged substantial additional funds for the training of teachers in TAFE, industry and the community, and for labour market and workplace literacy programs. The adult literacy component of the ALLP also provided for assistance to jobseekers, a television literacy teaching series, and collaboration with the States and Territories through the AEC and Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training (MOVEET).

The Commonwealth Minister for Education, Employment and Training has also established the Australian Language and Literacy Council (ALLC) within the National Board of Employment, Education and Training to advise him on the implementation of the ALLP. The ALLC investigates language and literacy issues that are relevant to such areas of education and training as award restructuring, development of

key competencies, and transference of skills, as well as monitoring progress of the policy (*Literacy Update*, 1992, 8). Professional support for the field is partly provided by the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, which is largely funded by DEET under the ALLP.

Apart from the proliferation of acronyms, it is too early to assess the long-term impact of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy . For practitioners, two immediate results were an influx of clients referred by the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES), and the introduction of new courses funded by the Department of Employment, Education and Training through the CES (*Literacy Link*, 1992, 7). The research thrust, initiated by the National Policy on Languages, and stimulated further by International Literacy Year, continues and is likely to result in more considered policy and more effective practice, as well as a better prepared literacy workforce. However, adult literacy research seems to have a lower priority under the ALLP than it had under ALAC and ILY.

As Pearse (1976, 78), Grant (1987, xi) and Simpson (1990, 11) noted, the States and Territories have responded in different ways to the provision of targeted Federal funds for adult literacy - not all are committed to the cause. The continuation of funding under the Adult Literacy and Language Policy is likely to be the key to how the States continue to respond, as well as a measure of the extent to which the Commonwealth Government has developed its understanding of the broad implications of inadequate literacy for adults.

Changes in postwar adult literacy policy and provision

In a paper of this length, it is not possible to mention all of the significant adult literacy developments and research projects, particularly those that have happened at State and Territory level, in the past twenty years. It is possible, however, to discern several changes and trends that have emerged in adult literacy policy and provision in the postwar period.

Attitude to the students

The attitude to the students is aligned with beliefs about the purposes of literacy. In the two decades after the war, adult literacy provision was seen largely in remedial terms - the army wanted soldiers who could read maps and routine orders, Duncan referred to 'the handicap of grossly defective schooling' (under the sub-heading 'Education for the handicapped'), and the TAFE colleges wanted to prepare students for other TAFE courses. Even the 1975 Richardson Report regarded lack of literacy skills as primarily a barrier to further education. But, as White

(1985, 32) has observed, early developments in the seventies arose principally from the concern of individuals rather than from government policies. And they were concerns 'not simply to provide skills to cope with the written word in everyday life but to enable people to gain greater freedom to make choices' (CAE, 1974, 4). Wickert's study (1989) established (or confirmed)that there is not one standard of literacy to which all should aspire, but a range of literacies for different contexts. Mention also needs to be made of the greater attention being given to numeracy, which formerly tended to be subsumed by 'literacy'.

The social justice theme continues strongly amongst adult literacy providers in Australia, and a 1989 report (Hartley) drew attention to the wider social costs of inadequate literacy. It is a theme that also permeates Federal Government policy, but the eighties and nineties have also seen the emergence of government driven economic and vocational imperatives. The linking of literacy and employment first appeared strongly in *Skills for Australia* (Dawkins and Holding, 1987) and continues with the Australian Language and Literacy Policy. Although the ALLP acknowledges the needs of the individual, it is firmly grounded in the Government's preoccupation with award restructuring and employment strategies (DEET, 1991, e.g. 1-2, 7).

The result has been an upsurge of labour market and workplace basic education programs, virtually unheard of in the seventies and early eighties. Education initiatives in the workplace have undoubtedly helped to address the problem of reaching many who have not sought help from institutionally based programs, and exemplify the adult education principles that link effective adult learning to the experiences of the learners and the need for immediate application. The concern here is that employers and policy makers may be looking for quick solutions (which presumably lead to improved productivity). As Grant (1985) and Wickert and Zimmerman (1991, 197) have pointed out, any belief in a simple 'cause and effect' link between literacy and employment does not recognise that lack of literacy skills is usually associated with other personal and social factors which may need to be addressed in the long term. *Come in Cinderella*, a Senate Standing Committee's report on adult and community education (Aulich, 1991, 90), acknowledged Wickert and Zimmerman's argument, recognising that 'there are important perspectives on literacy which are not necessarily present in current thinking about labour market programs'.

A move into the education mainstream

Another legacy of increased Government support is that adult basic education has moved from the margins to the mainstream. Kirner

(1984, 153) warned in 1984 of the marginalisation of the adult literacy movement because of its individual focus, its volunteer nature, its lack of clear integration with 'system wide' equal opportunity programs, and 'its preoccupation with the part, adult literacy/basic education, rather than with the whole, equal outcomes'. Things have changed: the use of volunteers is diminishing and those that continue are generally being trained to standards set by wider educational systems, and group work is becoming more the norm (Black, 1990, 6).

But the mainstream position of adult basic education has not come through a commitment to equal opportunity or equal outcomes (although those features are there). In International Literacy Year, Black (1990, 6) identified two of the reasons: the impact of *No Single Measure* and the economic implications for individuals and industry of limited literacy skills. As noted above, the latter is also very prominent in ALLP. The third reason is that adult literacy has been clearly linked with *language* in Federal Government reports, beginning with *A national language policy* (1984), followed by the *National policy on languages* (1987), and finally the *Australian language and literacy policy* (1991). ILY activities (1990) also fostered interaction between adult literacy and language development. The recommendations in *An emerging national curriculum: English literacy for adults* (TAFE, 1992) served only to cement the relationship.

In addition, the broad scope of activities in International Literacy Year brought the adult literacy movement into closer contact with other agencies and with literacy education in the primary and secondary schools systems. This has helped to encourage a more coherent approach to language and literacy teaching and to provide greater legitimacy for such provision in the post formal education sector. One of the outcomes of this collaboration has been the development of the Australian Literacy Foundation, bringing together such organisations as the Australian Council for Adult Literacy and the Australian Reading Association. ACAL itself appears to have become more influential in the development of government policy.

Increasing professionalisation

The move from 'marginal status to centre stage' (Black, 1990, 6) has meant not only a higher profile for adult basic education, but also pressure for professional development and accreditation of teachers and tutors, for core curricula, for comparable assessment across programs and States. There is no doubt that moves for a more professional and consistent approach to adult literacy and numeracy provision were overdue. Concerns for individual development and confidentiality often meant that 'adhocery' prevailed in teaching and

record keeping, and the students were not always offered the most effective tuition. One of the reasons for this was the lack of research data with which to support practice. This deficiency has been and is being addressed.

As with any development based on increased government funding, greater accountability is required. This too is only proper. However, as Nelson (1984) and Wickert (1990) have pointed out, one of the potential dangers is that adult literacy provision becomes too organised, too institutionalised and regulated - that government policy makers set the agenda because they control the funds and that 'professionals' take over practice and everything is neatly packaged. In the enthusiasm to spend the funds and to satisfy the requirements of those who fund research and provision, and in the current preoccupation with competencies for teachers and students, we need continually to consider whose interests are being served. Being in the mainstream also means swimming with the tide - we need to be willing to go in the direction the tide is carrying us or be strong enough to swim against the current when we believe the occasion warrants it.

I am not suggesting that government policy makers and professional teachers and administrators do not have a legitimate say in how provision is developed, but that educators should not be so overwhelmed by the appeal of a systematic approach, so enmeshed in the funding and accountability process, that they forget how complex an issue adult literacy is, or that literacy and numeracy are not ends in themselves. To emphasise this point, I can do no better than to conclude with the words of Arch Nelson, the first chairperson of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (1989, 34):

> ...our involvement in the literacy movement should, and often does, lead us to see the broader problems of which widespread illiteracy and inadequate literacy are a part. Nor is it enough to add simply that, in the future, a higher level of literacy will be necessary if we are to function satisfactorily as individuals and as communities. It is, in my view, much more important that people who work together on literacy problems are likely to develop the intelligent and compassionate attitudes and relationships that we must have if the technologically developed society of tomorrow is to be also a sane and humane society: a society which tries to give a 'fair go' to all.

'Intelligent and compassionate attitudes and relationships' have been a hallmark of adult literacy and numeracy policy and provision in

Australia in the past twenty years, and we must be careful to keep those features in balance with our desire for a more 'professional' approach.

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James A. Draper
"A selected chronology of events"
inMaurice C. Taylor and James A. Draper Eds. *Adult Literacy Perspectives* (1991)

1792 - Appearance of the first newspaper, *The Upper Canada Gazette*, in Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario).

1800 - (June 8.) First circulating library in Upper Canada (Niagara-on-the-Lake).

1810 - The first Common School Act was passed in Upper Canada. (Some adults took advantage of the opportunity to learn reading, writing and arithmetic.)

1825 - *The Mechanic's Institutes were established in England.

1831 - The first Mechanic's Institutes in Canada began in Upper Canada (Ontario) and Nova Scotia.

1844 - *Founding of the Danish Folk High School by Bishop N.F.S. Grundtvig (a school for young adults to help farm people cope with change).

- *Social/University Settlements were established, Toynbee Hall, England.

1850's - Various school boards in Upper Canada established evening classes for adults.

1853 - First Y.M.C.A. (the "Y") opened in Toronto (later offering evening classes for adults).

1870's - "Y" tents were established (with libraries, writing table and lecture series) and became an integral part of summer militia camps.

1876 - Y.M.C.A. sets up a special "Railway Department" to handle its educational and social activities in railroad construction camps.

1882 - Free Libraries Act passed in Ontario.

1891 - The Government of Ontario authorizes school boards to provide evening classes for anyone over the age of 14 who was unable to attend regular day school classes.

1897 - The First Women's Institute was established at Stoney Creek, Ontario (devoted to the education of rural women and to improving the quality of rural life).

1899 - The Canadian Reading Camp Association began working in frontier camps and communities in Ontario and elsewhere in Canada.

1900's - Beginning of concentrated educational programs for immigrants to Canada.

1912 - Formation of the Extension Department at the University of Alberta (later establishing its own radio station in 1925).

1917 - The Khaki College was established for the Canadian Army in England (became a prototype for army education in many other countries).

- The Workers' Education Association (W.E.A.) of Canada was founded (initially established in England). (By 1924, there was W.E.A.) activity in seven Ontario cities, in addition to Toronto.)

1919 - *United Kingdom Report on Education (a political program for democracy and the concept that every adult needed continuing education).
- Frontier College was incorporated, to replace the Canadian Reading Camp Association.

1928 - The St. Francis Xavier University (Antigonish, Nova Scotia) establishes its Extension Department (later focusing on the development of cooperatives and becoming the Antigonish Movement).

1929 - *World Conference on Adult Education, Cambridge England, sponsored by the World Association of Adult Education)to encourage international cooperation in adult education).

1935 - First survey of adult education in Canada.
- Founding of the Canadian Association for Adult Education (C.A.A.E.), Toronto.

1941 - National Farm Radio forum organised (through the cooperation of the Canadian Association for Adult Education; Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; Canadian Federation of Agriculture).

1946 - Founding of UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization.

1949 - *First UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education, Elsinore, Denmark (focussing on education for leisure; education for civic responsibility;international cooperation)

1953 - *UNESCO conducts a world survey of illiteracy.

1955 - World Literacy of Canada was incorporated (Toronto) to pursue work with the undereducated and illiterate in other countries and later Canada.

1958 - A graduate program in adult education began at the University of British Columbia; 1966 at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (O.I.S.E.), University of Toronto.

1960 - *Second UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education held in Montreal (placed literacy on the international development agenda; linked adult education and peace; was the first adult education conference where Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the communist Block were represented).
- *Beginning of the United Nations first Development Decade.
- A Dominion Bureau of Statistics report shows that 92% of all unemployed adults had not finished secondary school.
- The Technical and Vocational Training Assistance Act (T.V.T.A.) was passed (permitted agreements between the federal and provincial governments); followed by the Basic Training and Skill Development (B.T.S.D.) Program.

1961 - Census of Canada. Reports that over one million Canadians over the age of 15 had no schooling or less than grade 4. (Statistics also revealed that

the typical functional illiterate adult was Canadian born.)

1962 - *The Italian Association for the Eradication of Illiteracy sponsored the first international literacy conference.

1965 - *First World Conference of Minister of Education, to discuss adult literacy , Tehran, Iran.
- The "War on Poverty" (government programs to deal with the problems of poverty and inequality in Canada).
- *Beginning of the Decade Experimental World Literacy Programme (E.W.L.P.) in 11 countries, sponsored by UNESCO.

1966 - *The First Conference on Comparative Adult Education (Exeter, New Hampshire, U.S.A.).
- Seminar on Adult Basic Education (Toronto). (Sponsored by the C.A.A.E. (Canadian Association for Adult Education) and Frontier College, in association with The Technical Vocational Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration.)

1967 - Publication of *Functional Literacy and International Development* (A Study by J. Roby Kidd, of Canadian Capability to Assist with the World Campaign to Eradicate Illiteracy.)
- Adult Occupational Training Act (A.O.T). (Increases federal assistance to reduce unemployment and increase productivity of Canadian workers, with a greater focus on training; recognized the value of the B.T.S.D. Program.) (Replaces the Technical and Vocational Training Act of 1960.)
- *September 8 is designated by UNESCO as International Literacy Day.
- Creation of the federal government's NewStart Program. (Designed for the purposes of establishing action research centres in participating provinces; aimed at providing solutions to the problems of educational and socio-economical development for Canada's disadvantaged; and represented one aspect of the country's anti-poverty drive.) (By 1969, six provinces were participating in the NewStart Program, consisting of basic literacy and upgrading programs from grades 1 to 10.)

1968 - A National Seminar on A.B.E. was held at Elliot Lake, Ontario.
- the first life skills course was planned by Saskatchewan NewStart. (Also, out of the Saskatchewan program' came B.L.A.D.E.) – Basic Literacy for Adult Development; and L.I.N.C. – Learning Individualized for Canadians.)

1969 - The first Adult Day School was established as a Metropolitan Toronto Department of Social Services volunteer project; later, the Toronto Board of Education assumed the financial responsibility for teacher salaries and school supplies.

1970 - *Founding of the International Institute for Adult Literacy Methods (Iran). Publishes: Literacy Methods/Work/Review.

1971 - Publication of *Adult Basic Education* (the first major book on A.B.E. in Canada). (Edited by Michael Brooke.)

1972 - *UNESCO International Commission on the Development of Education publishes, *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*.
- Third UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education, Tokyo, out

of which came the International Council for Adult Education (I.C.A.E.).

1974 - "Special Issues on Adult Literacy in Canada", published in *Literacy Discussion.* (Summer : editors: James A. Draper, J.Roby Kidd and Barbara Kerfoot; Winter: editors Michael Brooke and Gerard Clam.)

- Annual meeting of World Literacy of Canada, focus on adult illiteracy in Canada (Ottawa). (Out of which came the "Canada Literacy Project".)
- The Canada Manpower Industrial Training Program is introduced (replacing a number of previous programs).

1975 - *Beginning of the B.B.C./T.V. (British Broadcasting Corporation) program on adult literacy. (*On the Move*: to create awareness of the problem of illiteracy; to refer persons who wished assistance with literacy skills to appropriate resources.)

- *World Conference of the International Women's Year (Mexico).
- *Second International Conference of Ministers of Education, on adult literacy (Persepolis, Iran). (Declaration of Persepolis.) (Focus on the needs of women; the needs for social development; education for liberation.)

1976 - *N.G.O. (I.C.A.E.) Conference on Adult Literacy (Toronto), jointly sponsored by W.L.C., the C.A.A.E., Conference on Adult Education Development (Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania). (Nongovernmental organizations.)

- National conference on Adult Literacy (Toronto), jointly sponsored by W.L.C., the C.A.A.E., and the I.C.A.E. (Release of the publication, *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Activities in Canada*, by Audrey Thomas, published by W.L.C.)
- The B.T.S.D. federal government journal on adult basic education becomes *Adult Training.*
- *Manpower Training at the Crossroads* conference (Ottawa). Sponsored by the C.A.A.E. and the I.C.E.A. (Institut canadien d'education des adultes).
- *Adoption of the *Recommendation* on the Development of Adult Education by the 19th Session of the U.N. General conference, Kenya.

1977 - National Conference on Adult Literacy (Ottawa). (Convened by the W.L.C. Canadian Project for Adult Basic and Literacy Education.) Out of this conference was formed the Movement for Canadian Literacy.

1979 - *The Mexican Declaration on the Decisive Role of Education in Development. (Sponsored by UNESCO with the cooperation of the U.N. Commission for Latin America and the Organization of American States. Spoke of the role of education as an integral part of economic, social and cultural planning.)

1980 - *Conference on professional aspects of literacy work. (Arusha, Tanzania). (Sponsored by the international Institute for Educational Planning and UNESCO.) (A second conference was held in Madras in 1982.)

- Celebration by Metropolitan Toronto Library Board of 150 years of the founding of the Mechanic's Institute. (The M.I. was one of the predecessors of the Metropolitan Toronto Library, with its reading rooms, as well as courses in arts and sciences.)

1981 - *International Seminar on Adult Literacy in Industrialized Countries (England). (Promoted by the International Council for Adult Education, and supported by UNESCO, the British Council, and U.K. Department of Education and Science.) (Organized by the National Institute of Adult Education and the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit of England and Wales.)

1982 - *Udaipur (India) "Declaration: Literacy for All by the Year 2000" (initiated by the German Foundation – D.S.E.).

- *N.G.O. (I.C.A.E.) Conference on Adult Education and Authentic Development (Paris).

1983 - *International Seminar: Cooperating for Literacy (Berlin). (An overview of the World Literacy situation and major issues.) (Sponsored by the I.C.A.E. and the German Foundation for International Development.)

- *U.S.A. campaign to combat adult illiteracy.

1984 - First Collective Consultation of International Non-Governmental Organizations on Literacy (UNESCO, Paris).

1985 - *Fourth UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education (March, Paris). (Declaration: "The Right To Learn.")

- *N.G.O. (I.C.A.E.) Conference on Adult Education, Development and Peace (Buenos Aires, Argentina).

- *Conference: Reflection on the Decade of Women (Nairobi, Kenya).

- UNESCO: Resolutions on Literacy, General Conference of the twenty-third session (Sofia, Bulgaria). (October.)

- Publication of *The Right To Learn*. (Report of the Work Group on Adult Literacy, the Board of Education for the City of Toronto.) (October.)

1986 - *The first international conference on the History of Adult Education (Oxford, England).

- *Workshop of Specialists in Europe on Prevention of Functional Illiteracy and Integration of Youth into the World of Work. (Sponsored by the UNESCO Institute of Education, Hamburg.) (Included an overview of illiteracy in industrialised countries.)

1987 - *Founding of the Commonwealth Association for the Education and Training of Adults (CAETA) in India. Mandate to support training programs in the Commonwealth, professional development and international sharing.

- *Second International conference on Literacy in Industrialized Countries, Toronto (sponsored by the I.CA.E.)

1990 - * Declared by the United Nations as International Literacy Year.

*Indicates International Events

Appendix

Key Dates in the History of Adult Literacy

When thinking about the history of adult literacy in Australia one of the things that people tried to do was remember dates of significance in the field. This was attempted a couple of times during the weekend and it was decided to ask around for further contributions. These accounts reflect the variety in perceptions and recollections of major events in the history of adult literacy. We include these accounts as a trigger for others to add to and develop.

Technical and Further Education in NSW - Some of the Major Developments

1833	Sydney Mechanics School of Arts founded.
1865	First 'technical' class conducted by the School of Arts - in Mechanical Drawing, taught by Norman Selfe.
1878	The Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts was established in the Working Men's college in several buildings scattered around the fringe of the city's business district. The college soon became known unofficially as the Sydney Technical College.
1883	The NSW government assumed financial responsibility for Sydney Technical College, placing its administration in the hands of an appointed Board of Technical Education. Technical classes began to spread to suburban and country areas.
1889	The NSW government assumed full responsibility for the administration of technical education, establishing the Technical Education branch of the Department of Public Instruction.
1891	The first classes moved to Sydney Technical College's permanent home in Ultimo. Most moved the following year. It served as the head office of the state's technical education system until 1959.
1913-15	The Technical Education Branch's courses, awards and administration underwent major reorganisation.
1918-22	The Repatriation Vocational Training Scheme trained thousands of returned service personnel for civilian careers.
1935	The report of the Technical Education Commission, established by the NSW government, made recommendations that influenced the development of technical education for the next thirty years.
WW 2	Sydney Technical College and the larger country and suburban colleges became training centres for service personnel and civilian war workers, whilst continuing with their normal functions. The Correspondence Training Division (which has developed into the Open College) enrolled some 100,000 Australian and 43,000 American students from the armed services serving in the Pacific region.

1944-58	The Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (C.R.T.S.) trained many thousands of returned service personnel.
1949	The Department of Technical Education was established as a separate department. The NSW University of Technology (now the University of NSW) was founded at Sydney Technical College. By stages it took over responsibility for the diploma (professional level) courses taught previously by the technical colleges.
1950s	The 1950s saw the development of certificate (technician level) courses.
1965	The NSW Institute of Technology was established within the Technical Education Department to conduct new diploma (professional level) courses. It became an independent College of Advanced Education in 1971, and is now the University of Technology, Sydney.
1975	Following publication of the Kangan Report in 1974, the Department of Technical Education became the Department of Technical and Further Education. This was more than just a change of name. From 1914 the main aim of technical education had been to meet the workforce needs of industry; it now became the development of individual students. Fees were abolished from 1974, leading to a dramatic increase in enrolments.
1980s	The 1980's saw the flowering of numerous special programs to meet the needs of groups of people who had been unable to take advantage of TAFE courses previously.
1989	The introduction of an Administrative Charge saw a significant decline in enrolments.
1990	The Scott Report recommended a major restructuring of TAFE. This restructuring began, and the Department of TAFE became an authority, responsible to the Director General of the Department of Further Education, Training and Employment (FETE).
1991	The Technical and Further Education Commission replaced the Department of TAFE.

From
Norm Neill
Head, TAFE History Unit
July 1991.

Division of Further Education, Ministry of Education, Victoria

Pre-1973	No adult literacy programs generally available.
1973	Council of Adult Education begins provision of adult literacy.
1975	Involvement of curriculum and research personnel from the Education Department.
1976	Adult literacy working party established at the Australian Association for Adult Education Conference. Full time adult basic education course (workforce retraining) begins at Footscray College of TAFE.
1977	Establishment of Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL). First national conference in Canberra. Expansion of program provision, eg. Outer Eastern Community Adult Literacy Program, Prahran College of TAFE. Establishment of Access Resource Centre, Council of Adult Education.
1978	ACAL National Conference in Melbourne. Formation of the Victorian Adult Literacy Council (VALC)
1979	Newsletter *Adult Literacy News* produced by VALC becomes *Fine Print.*
1983	International Literacy Day marked by VALC sponsored celebration at Prahran. First three regional adult literacy co-ordinators appointed. Publication of booklet *Signpost*, a disabilities resources guide.
1984	Executive officer for VALC employed. ACAL National Conference held in Melbourne.
1985	VALC office located at the Council of Adult Education. Five more regional adult literacy co-ordinators appointed on annual Commonwealth funding, some half-time.
1986	Myer Foundation Grant of $10,500 for VALC survey of programs available, across Victoria, for the report *Literacy Matters*. VALC changes its name to the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC). Policy documentation prepared for the TAFE Board.
1987	First State Adult Literacy Conference organised by VALBEC, funded by the TAFE Board. Held in Geelong and 270 people attended. Conference addressed by Hon. Ian Cathie, Minister for Education. ALBE Unit of TAFE Board established with two staff. Advisory committee to Unit established. Lobbying by VALBEC to obtain recurrent State funding for adult literacy becomes part of the 1988 budget initiative submission.
1988	Establishment of the Division of Further Education. State budget: first allocation specifically for adult literacy and basic education, $2.5m in 188-89, $3.4m in 1989-90. Consultant, Vin D'Cruz appointed to look at needs of adult literacy and

	basic education. Report written. National Policy on Languages (NPL) projects established: VALBEC mini-conferences, small groups project: student worker; La Trobe University spring and summer schools; student writing weekends; materials resourcing strategy. Regional Further Education Councils appointed.
1989	Permanent adult basic education senior consultant employed by the Division of Further Education. Ten regional Councils of Further Education funded for a permanent regional ALBE officer. Adult literacy and basic education project team employed by the Division of Further Education. Twenty-four major adult literacy and basic education project team employed by the Division of Further Education. NPL and State funds used to support professional development activities through the Division of Further Education (conference strategy).

From:
Bradshaw, B., Evans, D. et. al. (1989) *Adult Literacy and Basic Education into the 1990s Volume 2* Ministry of Education Victoria; pg 10-11.

Some Themes of ACAL Conferences

ACAL conference highlight something of the theoretical and methodological positions in the field over the period of 1978 to 1994.

1978	Language Experience
1979	The place of theories in Adult Reading Programs- Brennan
1980	Spoken and Written Language
1981	Language Experience
1982	Language Experience
1983	Authentic Materials
1984	Language Experience
1985	Functional for whom - Lankshear
1986	Where do written texts come from?
1987-1990	Genre
1990	Literacy Rating Scales Skill Formation Agenda for 90s Report on Strategic Review Commonwealth State Literacy Expenditure
1992	Policy Competency Agenda Industry Service Provider Perspective Workplace Critical Literacy
1994	Critical Issues: Essential Priorites

NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council

May, 1977 100 delegates from all over Australia attended the first National Conference on Adult Literacy, sponsored by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy.

June 1977 At a public meting in Sydney, a steering committee was formed to prepare a constitution for establishment of the NSW Adult Literacy Council.

August 1977 The Council was formally inaugurated. Since its formation the Council has regularly published its newsletter, Literacy Exchange, which reports on activities state-wide.

October 1978 The Council prepared four half-hour video programs, presented on Channel 7 in November. A large public response for tuition, and offers of help from volunteers paved the way for the increase, in the following years, of Adult Literacy provision with NSW. This response instigated the establishment of a state-wide referral service which is now operated under the auspices of NSW TAFE as the Adult Literacy Information Office.

May 1979 The NSW Council organised the Third National Conference on behalf of the A.C.A.L., at Wesley College, University of Sydney. Over 200 delegates attended from all over Australia.

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